

NEAR EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

ALGERIA

The Constitution declares Islam to be the state religion but prohibits discrimination based on religious belief, and the Government generally respects religious freedom in practice; however, there were some restrictions.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Islam is the only state-sanctioned religion, and the law limits the practice of other faiths, including prohibiting public assembly for purposes of practicing a faith other than Islam; however, the Government follows a de facto policy of tolerance by allowing, in limited instances, the conduct of religious services by non-Muslim faiths in the capital, which were open to the public. Self-proclaimed Muslim terrorists continue to justify their killing of security force members and civilians by referring to interpretations of religious texts; however, the level of violence perpetrated by terrorists continued to decline during the period covered by this report.

The generally amicable relationship among religions at government and social levels contributed to religious freedom; however, differences remain within the country's Muslim majority about the interpretation and practice of Islam. A very small number of citizens, such as Ibadi Muslims living in the desert town of Ghardaia, practice non-mainstream forms of Islam or practice other religions but there is minimal societal discrimination against them.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total land area of 919,595 square miles, and its population is approximately 32,818,500. The vast majority of citizens are Sunni Muslims. Official data on the number of non-Muslim residents is not available, however practitioners report it to be in the tens of thousands. Many citizens who practice non-Muslim faiths have fled the country due to the civil unrest; as a result, the number of Christians and Jews in the country is significantly lower than the estimated total before 1992. The small Christian community, which is predominantly Roman Catholic, has approximately 25,000 members, and the Jewish community numbers perhaps fewer than 100 persons. There are no reliable figures on the numbers of atheists in the country, and very few persons identify themselves as such.

For security reasons, due mainly to the 11-year civil conflict, both Christians and Jews concentrated in the large cities of Algiers, Constantine, and Oran in the mid-1990s. There also is a Christian community in the eastern region of Kabylie.

There is only one missionary group operating in the country on a full-time basis. Other evangelical groups travel to and from the country but are not established. While Christians do not proselytize actively, they report that conversions take place without government sanction or interference.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution declares Islam to be the state religion but prohibits discrimination based on religious belief, and the Government generally respects this prohibition in practice, with some limited exceptions. The law limits the practice of other faiths; however, the Government follows a de facto policy of tolerance by allowing, in limited instances, the conduct of religious services by non-Muslim faiths in the capital which were open to the public. The small Christian and tiny Jewish populations generally practice their faiths without government interference.

Missionary groups are permitted to conduct humanitarian activities without government interference as long as they are discreet and do not proselytize. Many of the "home churches" in which Christians worship are in contact with the Government, and none report being intimidated or threatened.

The study of Islam is a strict requirement in the public schools, which are regulated by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Education is free to all citizens below the age of 16. Both private primary and private secondary schools operate in the country; however, the Government did not extend recognition to these institutions during the period covered by this report, and therefore private school students must register as independent students within the public school system in order to take national baccalaureate examinations.

In February the quasi-governmental High Islamic Council sponsored an international symposium on interfaith cooperation in Algiers entitled "The Dialogue of Civilizations," followed by a second symposium in April examining trends in Western and Eastern religious thought. The country's leading Islamic and non-Islamic religious leaders also attended regional symposia hosted by the Algerian immigrant community in France to discuss Algerian Jewry, inter-faith relations, and religious tolerance. In March 2002, an international symposium on "Rapprochement among Islamic Rites" was held in Algiers. Topics discussed included terrorism, religious fundamentalism, and women's rights.

The Government recognizes the Islamic holy days of 'Eid Al-Adha, 'Eid Al-Fitr, Awal Moharem, Achoura, and Mawlid Nabbaoui as national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government appoints imams to mosques and provides general guidance on sermons. However, during the period covered by this report there were reports that adherents replaced government-appointed imams with ones whose views more closely aligned to the sentiments of local practitioners. The Government monitors activities in mosques for possible security-related offenses, bars the use of mosques as public meeting places outside of regular prayer hours, and convokes imams to the Ministry of Religious Affairs for "disciplinary action" when warranted.

Amendments to the Penal Code in 2001 established strict punishments, including fines and prison sentences, for anyone other than a government-designated imam who preaches in a mosque. The Ministry of Religious Affairs coordinated with imams in certain regions to reduce religious extremism following reports that Salafist members called for the boycott of specific prayers, the division of mosques between Salafi and non-Salafi members, and the right to lead religious lessons and hold religious seminars. Harsher punishments were established for any person, including government-designated imams, if such persons act "against the noble nature of the mosque" or act in a manner "likely to offend public cohesion." The amendments do not specify what actions would constitute such acts. By law, the Government is allowed to pre-screen religious sermons before they are delivered publicly. However, in practice the Government generally reviews sermons after the fact. The Government's right of review has not been exercised among non-Islamic faiths.

During the period covered by this report, the Government sanctioned a number of imams for inflammatory sermons following the May 21 earthquake and for interpretations of the Koran "likely to offend public cohesion." The Ministry of Religious Affairs provides some financial support to mosques and during the period covered by this report sought to expand its control over the training of imams through a government-run Islamic educational institute. This institute would ensure that all imams are of the highest educational caliber and present messages in line with government guidelines in place to stem Islamic fanaticism. At the end of the period covered by this report, no school had actually been established.

The law prohibits public assembly for purposes of practicing a faith other than Islam. However, Roman Catholic churches, including a cathedral in Algiers (the seat of the Archbishop), conduct services without government interference, as does a Protestant church. In 1994 the size of the Jewish community diminished significantly due to fear of terrorist violence, and the synagogue in Algiers since has been abandoned. There are only a few small churches and other places of worship; non-Muslims usually congregate in private homes for religious services.

Islamic (Shari'a) law does not recognize conversion from Islam to any other religion; however, conversion is not illegal under civil law. Conversions from Islam to other religions are rare. Due to safety concerns and potential legal and social problems, Muslim converts practice their new faith clandestinely (see Section III). Non-Islamic proselytizing is illegal, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Interior, and Ministry of Commerce all must approve the importation of large quantities of non-Islamic literature for widespread distribution. Restrictions on the importation of Arabic and Berber translations of non-Is-

lamic texts are enforced periodically. Personal copies of the major works of other religions, such as the Bible, may be brought into the country. Occasionally such works are sold in local bookstores in Algiers, and in general non-Islamic religious texts no longer are difficult to find. Non-Islamic religious music and video selections also are available. The Government prohibits the dissemination of any literature that portrays violence as a legitimate precept of Islam.

While they do not proselytize actively, Christians report that conversions to Christianity take place without government sanction or interference.

Some aspects of Shari'a as interpreted and applied in the country discriminate against women. The 1984 Family Code, which is based in large part on Shari'a, treats women as minors under the legal guardianship of a husband or male relative. For example, a woman must obtain a father's approval to marry. While there are no limitations on or burdens of legal proof required of men seeking divorce, the Family Code limits a woman's ability to gain a divorce for reasons other than seven codified provisions. Divorce can be granted to wives whose husbands are impotent, abusive, adulterers, or convicted criminals, and can be granted in instances where the husband has been absent from the family for more than one year, where a husband has refrained from sexual relations for more than four months, or where a husband has committed an "immoral infraction" such as pedophilia. In rare instances, a woman can seek divorce through "purchasing" her freedom from her husband through a practice known as "khlouay." In keeping with Islamic law, husbands generally keep the right to the family's home in the case of divorce. Custody of the children normally is awarded to the mother, but she may not enroll them in a school or take them out of the country without the father's authorization. Only males are able to confer citizenship on their children. Muslim women are prohibited from marrying non-Muslims. Muslim men may marry non-Muslim women.

Women also suffer from discrimination in inheritance claims; in accordance with Shari'a, women are entitled to a smaller portion of a deceased husband's estate than are his male children or his brothers. According to Shari'a, such a distinction is justified because other provisions require that the husband's income and assets be used to support the family, while the wife's income and assets remain her own. Women may take out business loans and are the sole custodians of their dowries. However, in practice women do not always have exclusive control over assets that they bring to a marriage or income that they earn themselves. Females under 18 years of age may not travel abroad without the permission of a male legal guardian.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The country's 11-year civil conflict has pitted self-proclaimed radical Muslims against moderate Muslims. Approximately 150,000 civilians, terrorists, and security forces have been killed during the past 11 years. Extremist self-proclaimed Islamists have issued public threats against all "infidels" in the country, both foreigners and citizens, and have killed both Muslims and non-Muslims, including missionaries. Extremists continued attacks against both the Government and moderate Muslim and secular civilians; however, the level of violence perpetrated by these terrorists continued to decline during the period covered by this report. There were 183 civilian deaths due to terrorism in the first 6 months of the year, compared with 313 civilians killed in the same period in 2002. These figures contrast with more than 1,000 killings per month several years ago. The majority of the country's terrorist groups, as a rule, do not differentiate between religious and political killings. During the period covered by this report, the majority of cases of security force and civilian deaths at the hands of terrorists were a result of knifings (particularly throat-slitting) and shootings. Terrorists, often claiming religious justification for their actions, set up roadblocks to kill civilians and security force personnel.

During the period covered by this report, an indeterminate number of persons were serving prison sentences due to their alleged Islamist sympathies or membership in Islamist groups that commit or endorse terrorist acts; however, there were no reports of cases in which it was clear that persons were arrested or detained based solely on their religious beliefs.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

In general noncitizens who practice faiths other than Islam enjoy a high level of tolerance within society; however, citizens who renounce Islam generally are ostracized by their families and shunned by their neighbors. The Government generally

does not become involved in such disputes. Converts also expose themselves to the risk of attack by radical extremists.

The majority of cases of harassment and security threats against non-Muslims come from radical Islamists who are determined to rid the country of those who do not share their extremist interpretation of Islam (see Section II). However, a majority of the population subscribes to Islamic precepts of tolerance in religious beliefs. Moderate Islamist religious and political leaders have criticized publicly acts of violence committed in the name of Islam.

Anti-Semitism in state-owned and independent media publications and broadcasts tends to be limited to editorials addressing Palestinian issues. Intermittent articles covering the war in Iraq also displayed a level of religious intolerance not normally seen in the local press during other periods covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

The U.S. Embassy deepened its outreach to the Muslim community through strong and close contact and programs with the Islamic Abdel Kader University in Constantine, and visits with imams in areas throughout the country, including Tolga to the south, Tlemcen to the west, and Constantine and Thenia to the west. The Embassy maintained close contact with the High Islamic Council and leaders of various zawiyat (religious schools and centers). The Embassy maintained frequent contact with three Islamic political parties (Movement for Peaceful Society, El Islah, Ennahda) and met with the Wafa Party, whose legal status remains unrecognized by the Government. The Embassy maintains contact with social service non governmental organizations and a scholarly institute.

The Embassy maintained close contact with religious leaders in the non-Muslim community, who expressed concerns that radical Islamists and government restrictions on the importation of religious materials were increasing impediments to practicing their faith.

The U.S. Embassy maintained frequent contact with the National Consultative Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights (CNCPPDH), a quasi-governmental human rights organization established by the Government in 2001 in response to international and domestic pressure to improve its human rights record. Individuals and groups who believe they are not being received fairly by the Ministry of Religious Affairs may have their concerns heard by this commission.

BAHRAIN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, there were some limits on this right. The Constitution declares that Islam is the official religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. In the past, the Government did not tolerate political dissent, including from religious groups or leaders; however, in February 2001, the Amir pardoned and released all remaining political prisoners and religious leaders. Also in 2001, the Government registered new religious nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including some with legal authority to conduct political activities. In February 2002, King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa issued a new Constitution and announced May 2002 municipal council elections and October 2002 National Assembly elections. Candidates associated with religious political societies won 40 of the 50 municipal council seats contested in the May 2002 election. In the October 2002 legislative elections, candidates associated with religious parties won more than half of the Council of Representatives' 40 seats. In both elections, candidates from religious political societies conducted their campaigns without any interference from the Government. One Christian and one Jewish Bahraini were appointed to the Shura council. The Government continues to subject both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims to some governmental control and monitoring, and there is some government discrimination against Shi'a Muslims. Members of other religions who practice their faith privately do so without interference from the Government.

Relations among religions in society generally are amicable; however, Shi'a Muslims, who constitute the majority of the population, sometimes resent minority Sunni Muslim rule.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 231 square miles, and its population is approximately 670,000. The citizen population is 98 percent Muslim, and Jews and Christians constitute the remaining 2 percent. Muslim citizens belong to the Shi'a and Sunni branches of Islam, with Shi'a constituting as much as two-thirds of the indigenous population.

Foreigners, mostly from South Asia and other Arab countries, constitute approximately 38 percent of the total population. Roughly half of resident foreigners are non-Muslim, including Christians, Jews, Hindus, Baha'is, Buddhists, and Sikhs.

The American Mission Hospital, which is affiliated with the National Evangelical Church, has operated in the country for more than a century. The church adjacent to the hospital holds weekly services and also serves as a meeting place for other Protestant denominations.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution states that Islam is the official religion and also provides for freedom of religion; however, there were some limits on this right. In the past, the Government did not tolerate political dissent, including from religious groups or leaders; however, in February 2001 the King pardoned and released all remaining political prisoners and religious leaders, including Shi'a clerics. The Government continues to register new religious NGOs, including some with the legal authority to conduct political activities. In February 2002, the King issued a new Constitution and announced May 2002 municipal council elections and October 2002 National Assembly elections. Candidates associated with religious political societies won 40 of the 50 municipal council seats contested in the May 2002 election. In the October 2002 legislative election, candidates associated with religious groups won more than half of the Council of Representatives' 40 seats. In both elections, candidates from religious political societies conducted their campaigns without interference from the Government. One Christian and one Jew were appointed to the Shura council. The Government continues to subject both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims to some governmental control and monitoring, and there is some government discrimination against Shi'a Muslims. Members of other religions who practice their faith privately do so without interference from the Government, and are permitted to maintain their own places of worship and display the symbols of their religion.

Every religious group must obtain a permit from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs to conduct religious activities. Depending on circumstances, a religious group also may need approvals from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Information, and the Ministry of Education (if the religious group wants to run a school). During the period covered by this report, 13 Christian congregations that were registered with the Ministry of Labor were able to operate freely. Those congregations with places of worship generally allow other congregations to use them. Other unregistered Christian congregations likely exist, and there is no attempt by the Government to force them to register. There is a synagogue, four Sikh temples, and several official and unofficial Hindu temples, located in Manama and its suburbs. Holding a religious meeting without a permit is illegal; however, there were no reports of religious groups being denied a permit.

In 2001 the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar India, which is affiliated with the U.S. Episcopal Church, applied for authority to build its own church building; however, the church had still not received permission from all government authorities to begin construction by the end of the period covered by this report. Members were considering other, less satisfactory, options to obtain or construct a building for their congregation.

The High Council for Islamic Affairs is charged with the review and approval of all clerical appointments within both the Sunni and Shi'a communities, and maintains program oversight for all citizens studying religion abroad.

The civil and criminal legal systems consist of a complex mix of courts based on diverse legal sources, including Sunni and Shi'a Shari'a (Islamic law), tribal law, and other civil codes and regulations. Christian and Jewish citizens are allowed to adhere to their own laws of inheritance.

The Shi'a religious celebration of Ashura is a 2-day national holiday in which large public processions take place. The Government does not hinder these processions. During the period covered by this report, the Ministry of Information provided full media coverage of Ashura events.

Notable dignitaries from virtually every religion and denomination visit the country and frequently meet with the Government and civic leaders.

The following religious holidays are considered national holidays: Eid al-Adha, Islamic New Year, Ashoora, Prophet's Birthday, and Eid al-Fitr.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government funds, monitors, and closely controls all official religious institutions. These include Shi'a and Sunni mosques, Shi'a ma'tams (religious community centers), Shi'a and Sunni Waqfs (charitable foundations), and the religious courts, which represent both the Ja'afari (Shi'a) and Maliki (Sunni) schools of Islamic jurisprudence. While the Government rarely interferes with what it considers legitimate religious observations, in the past it actively suppressed any activity deemed overtly political in nature. The Government permits public religious events, most notably the large annual commemorative marches by Shi'a, but police closely monitor such events. At least one unregistered ma'tam was established in February. The Government reportedly has not hindered its activities.

In the past, the Government occasionally closed mosques and ma'tams for allowing political demonstrations to take place on or near their premises or to prevent religious leaders from delivering political speeches during Friday prayer and sermons; however, there were no reported closures of mosques or ma'tams during the period covered by this report. In past years, the Government detained religious leaders for delivering political sermons or for allowing such sermons to be delivered in their mosques. The Government also has appropriated or withheld funding in order to reward or punish particular individuals or places of worship; however, there were no reports of such detentions or funding restrictions during the period covered by this report.

The Government discourages proselytizing by non-Muslims and prohibits anti-Islamic writings. However, Bibles and other Christian publications are displayed and sold openly in local bookstores that also sell Islamic and other religious literature. Religious tracts of all branches of Islam, cassettes of sermons delivered by Muslim preachers from other countries, and publications of other religions readily are available. However, a government-controlled proxy server prohibits user access to Internet sites considered to be antigovernment or anti-Islamic. The software used is unreliable and often inhibits access to non-controversial sites as well.

There are no restrictions on the number of citizens permitted to make pilgrimages to Shi'a shrines and holy sites in Iran, Iraq, and Syria. In the past, stateless residents who did not possess Bahraini passports had difficulties arranging travel to religious sites abroad; however, the Government addressed this problem the past 2 years by granting citizenship to thousands of previously stateless residents. During the period covered by this report, 1,000 persons were granted citizenship. The Government monitors travel to Iran and scrutinizes carefully those who choose to pursue religious study there.

Although there are notable exceptions, the Sunni Muslim minority enjoys a favored status. Sunnis receive preference for employment in sensitive government positions and in the managerial ranks of the civil service. Shi'a citizens do not hold significant posts in the defense and internal security forces; however, since 1999, Shi'a have been allowed to be employed in the enlisted ranks of the Bahrain Defense Force and with the Ministry of the Interior, two bodies in which Shi'a had been denied employment during previous years. In October 2002, for the first time the Government licensed a school to provide students with a Shi'a religious curriculum designed to educate the next generation of Shi'a religious scholars.

The political dynamic of Sunni predominance in the past has led to incidents of unrest between the Shi'a community and the Government. There were no reports of significant political or religious unrest during the period covered by this report.

Shari'a governs the personal legal rights of women, although the new Constitution provides for women's political rights. Specific rights vary according to Shi'a or Sunni interpretations of Islamic law, as determined by the individual's faith, or by the courts in which various contracts, including marriage, have been made. While both Shi'a and Sunni women have the right to initiate a divorce, religious courts may refuse the request. Although local religious courts may grant a divorce to Shi'a women in routine cases, occasionally Shi'a women seeking divorce under unusual circumstances must travel abroad to seek a higher ranking opinion than that available in the country. Women of either branch of Islam may own and inherit property and may represent themselves in all public and legal matters. In the absence of a direct male heir, a Shi'a woman may inherit all property. In contrast, a Sunni woman—in the absence of a direct male heir—inherits only a portion as governed by Shari'a; the balance is divided among brothers, uncles, and male cousins of the deceased. A Muslim woman legally may marry a non-Muslim man if the man converts to Islam. In such marriages, the children automatically are considered to be Muslim.

In divorce cases, the courts routinely grant Shi'a and Sunni women custody of daughters under the age of 9 and sons under age 7, although custody usually reverts to the father once the children reach those ages. In all circumstances except mental incapacitation, the father, regardless of custody decisions, retains the right to make certain legal decisions for his children, such as guardianship of any property belonging to the child, until the child reaches legal age. A noncitizen woman automatically loses custody of her children if she divorces their citizen father.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In previous years, the Government held in detention hundreds of Shi'a, including religious leaders, for offenses involving "national security;" however, by February 2001, the Amir had pardoned and released all political prisoners, detainees, and exiles, including Hassan Sultan and Haji Hassan Jasrallah, two Shi'a clerics associated with prominent cleric Abdul Amir Al-Jamri, as well as Shi'a political activists Haasan Mushaimaa and Abdul Wahab Hussein, who had been in detention for more than 5 years.

Sheikh Issa Qassim, a cleric and the former head of the Shi'a Religious Party, returned to the country after an 8-year exile. The Government permitted large crowds of celebrating Shi'a to greet Qassim upon his return.

The Government charged seven individuals, including lawyers, journalists, and women's activists who criticized decisions of Shari'a court judges, in order to highlight the need for the proposed Personal Status Law. The judges filed a criminal suit against the individuals for slander against Islam. The case was still ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners during the period covered by this report whose imprisonment could be attributed solely to the practice of their religion.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Although there are notable exceptions, the Sunni Muslim minority enjoys a favored status. In the private sector, Shi'a tend to be employed in lower paid, less skilled jobs. Educational, social, and municipal services in most Shi'a neighborhoods, particularly in rural villages, are inferior to those found in Sunni urban communities. In an effort to remedy social discrimination, the Government has built numerous subsidized housing complexes, which are open to all citizens on the basis of financial need. In order to ease both the housing shortage and strains on the national budget, in 1997 the Government revised its policy to permit lending institutions to finance mortgages on apartment units.

Converts from Islam to other religions are not well tolerated by society, but some small groups worship in their homes.

In May 2002, 70 graves at the St. Christopher's Church graveyard were desecrated. Crosses were uprooted and broken and headstones were smashed, making identification of some graves impossible. The King offered to restore the graveyard and transform it into a monument to Christian-Muslim relations on the Island. In response to the Church's preference only to restore the graveyard to its original condition, the King provided \$80,000 (30,000 BD).

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

An official written dialog takes place between U.S. Embassy officials and government contacts on matters of religion. One such example is the memorandum received by the Embassy each year from the Government in response to the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.

EGYPT

The Constitution provides for freedom of belief and the practice of religious rites; however, the Government places restrictions on this right. According to the Constitution, Islam is the official state religion and the primary source of legislation,

and religious practices that conflict with Islamic law (Shari'a) are prohibited. However, the practice of Christianity or Judaism does not conflict with Shari'a and, for the most part, members of the non-Muslim minority worship without harassment and maintain links with coreligionists in other countries.

There was some improvement in the Government's respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, such as greater recognition and tolerance of Coptic Christians; however, the Government continued to fail to bring to justice those responsible for killing 21 Christians at Al-Kush, and converts from Islam face periodic detention and discrimination. There were some abuses and restrictions and the Government continued to prosecute for unorthodox religious beliefs and practices that "insult heavenly religions."

There continued to be religious discrimination and sectarian tension in society during the period covered by this report.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialogue and policy of promoting human rights. Senior Administration officials, the U.S. Ambassador, and members of Congress have continued to raise U.S. concerns about religious discrimination with President Hosni Mubarak and other senior government officials.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 370,308 square miles, and its population is approximately 69.2 million. Most citizens, approximately 90 percent, are Sunni Muslims. There is a small number of Shi'a Muslims who constitute less than 1 percent of the population. Approximately 8 to 10 percent of the population are Christians, the majority of whom belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church. Other Christian communities include the Armenian Apostolic, Catholic (Armenian, Chaldean, Greek, Melkite, Roman, and Syrian Catholic), Maronite, and Orthodox (Greek and Syrian) Churches. An evangelical Protestant church, first established in the middle of the 19th century, has grown to a community of 17 Protestant denominations. There also are followers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which was granted legal status in the 1960s. The non-Muslim, non-Coptic Orthodox communities range in size from several thousand to hundreds of thousands. The number of Baha'is has been estimated at between several hundred and a few thousand. The Jewish community numbers fewer than 200 persons. There are very few declared atheists.

Christians are geographically dispersed throughout the country, although the percentage of Christians tends to be higher in upper (southern) Egypt and some sections of Cairo and Alexandria.

There are many foreign missionary groups that work within the country, especially Roman Catholics and Protestants who have had a presence in the country for 100 years or more, although their mission involves education, social, and development work more than proselytizing. The Government generally tolerates missionary groups if they do not proselytize actively.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of belief and the practice of religious rites; however, the Government places restrictions on this right. According to the Constitution, Islam is the official state religion and the primary source of legislation, and religious practices that conflict with Shari'a are prohibited. However, the practice of Christianity or Judaism does not conflict with Shari'a and, for the most part, members of the non-Muslim minority worship without harassment and maintain links with coreligionists in other countries.

For a religious denomination to be officially recognized by the State, a request must be submitted to the Religious Affairs Department at the Ministry of Interior, which assesses whether the proposed religion would pose a threat or upset national unity or social peace. The department also consults the leading religious figures recognized in the country, particularly the Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Sheik of Al-Azhar. The registration is then referred to the president, who issues a decree recognizing the new religion according to Law 15 of 1927. If a religious group chooses to bypass the official registration process, participants could be subject to detention and could also face prosecution under Article 98F of the Penal Code, which forbids the "ridiculing of a heavenly religion."

The Constitution requires schools to offer religious instruction. Public and private schools provide religious instruction according to the faith of the student.

The religious establishment of Al-Azhar and the Ministry of Awqaf (Islamic Religious Endowments) engage in interfaith discussions both domestically and abroad.

First Lady Suzanne Mubarak has supported the development of reading and other curricular materials that advocate tolerance, which are distributed under her patronage by literacy projects aimed at children and adults, such as a “Reading for All” festival held annually.

While the Government generally supports dialogue to promote religious tolerance, instances of intolerance, such as anti-Semitism, continue to appear in government-supported media. For example, in November and December 2002, Dream TV aired a historical drama entitled “Horseman without a Horse.” While the Government had only a 10 percent ownership stake in the station, the Ministries of Information and Culture had vetted and approved the series. The 41-episode series contained numerous anti-Semitic depictions of Jewish characters and included some references to the spurious “Protocols of the Elders of Zion.” Following several interventions by foreign diplomats, state-owned Egypt TV, one of many stations in the Middle East broadcasting the series, edited 77 minutes from the program and added a disclaimer, which noted that the historical authenticity of the protocols had never been established and that the series was the result of the author’s imagination. Pro-government papers subsequently published a denunciation of the protocols by historian Abdel Wahab al-Messiry. In addition, in late December 2002, Presidential advisor Ossama El-Baz published a three-part series in the pro-government newspaper al-Ahram in which he explained the origins of and criticized the phenomenon of anti-Semitism.

The following religious holidays are designated national holidays: ‘Eid Al-Fitr, ‘Eid Al-Adha, the Islamic new year, the birthday of the prophet Muhammad, and Christmas (January 7 on the Eastern calendar).

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

All mosques must be licensed, and the Government is engaged in an effort to control them legally in a proclaimed effort to combat extremists. The Government appoints and pays the salaries of the imams who lead prayers in mosques and monitors their sermons. In June 2002, the Minister of Awqaf announced that of the more than 80,000 mosques in the country, the Government controls administratively 60,000 regular mosques and 15,000 mosques located in private buildings. The Minister said that the Government hoped to control all mosques by the end of 2003.

An 1856 Ottoman decree still in force requires non-Muslims to obtain a presidential decree to build a place of worship. In addition Interior Ministry regulations issued in 1934 specify a set of 10 conditions that the Government must consider prior to issuance of a presidential decree permitting construction of a church. These conditions include the location of the proposed site, the religious composition of the surrounding community, and the proximity of other churches. The Ottoman decree also requires the president to approve permits for the repair of church facilities.

In 1999 in response to strong criticism of the Ottoman decree, President Mubarak issued a decree making the repair of all places of worship subject to a 1976 civil construction code. The decree places churches and mosques on equal footing before the law and facilitates significantly church repairs. However, local permits are still subject to approval by security authorities. Christians maintained that, in some cases, permits can take years to obtain. Security officials also may deny or delay permits for the supply of water and electricity. The incidence of blocked or delayed permits varies, often depending on the nature of the church’s relationship with local security officials and the approach of the governor. During the period covered by this report, (according to statistics published by the Government of Egypt’s Official Gazette), President Mubarak approved a total of nine permits for church related construction, including two for the construction of new churches, two for the demolition and reconstruction of new churches, three for the construction of church facilities, one for an already-constructed church, and one for church repairs. In the previous period, the Government issued 23 permits.

The approval process for church construction continued to be time-consuming and insufficiently responsive to the wishes of the Christian community. Although President Mubarak reportedly has approved all requests for permits presented to him, Christians maintain that the Interior Ministry delays—in some instances indefinitely—submission to the president of their requests. They also maintain that security forces have blocked them from using permits that have been issued, and that local security officials at times blocked, delayed or denied them permits for repairs to church buildings and/or the supply of water and electricity to existing church facilities.

In 2001 President Mubarak ordered the reconstruction at Government expense of two church buildings in Qalyubia that local authorities had demolished. However, as of July, local security officials continued to obstruct the construction of a staircase in one of the two buildings. Also in Qalyubia, security officials continued to

deny requests for the supply of water and electricity to an 11-story building, part of which is used as a church. In the Cairo suburb of Ezbet el-Nakhl, church officials continue to await a presidential decree authorizing the demolition and reconstruction of a small church 16 years after the request was first made. In February the media reported that a priest in Assiyut who had filed a 2002 request to demolish and rebuild a home for the elderly was summoned by local security authorities and pressed to sign a statement pledging not to undertake the requested construction.

As a result of these restrictions, some communities use private buildings and apartments for religious services or build without permits. In April authorities permitted the re-opening of a building used as a church in Nag'a al-Qiman, Sohag province, after ordering its closure in 2002 and briefly detaining some members of the congregation. Although the church in the building operated without a government permit, it had been used as a place of worship since 1975.

In February the Government issued a permit for the construction of a church in the new community of al-'Obour (north of Cairo). The site had been the source of previous controversy when the mayor of al-'Obour ordered the demolition of a fence surrounding a plot of land designated for construction of the new church in December 2001. The local congregation had erected the fence without a permit and had begun holding prayer services on the site while they awaited a presidential decree. In addition the congregation of the Baptist church in Awlad Ilyas, near Assiyut, has used the churchyard for prayers because local police have prevented repairs to the structure.

In 1996 human rights activist Mamdouh Naklah filed suit challenging the constitutionality of a 1934 Minister of Interior decree, which was based on the 1856 Ottoman decree governing the building of places of worship for non-Muslims. In November 2002, the State Commissioners' Body issued a "final" advisory opinion, rejecting the suit on the grounds that the challenged decree was issued before the Commissioners' Body was established in 1946. Subsequently, in an April 15 hearing, a judge ruled that no further consideration of the suit was warranted. On June 27, the Administrative Court, which is part of the State Council, rejected the case on the grounds that the decree in question was issued in 1933, before the establishment of the State Council, which was established in 1947. The Administrative Court argued that it could not rule on a law predating its establishment. Nakhla plans to appeal before the Higher Administrative Court.

On September 28, 2002, Sayyed Tolba was sentenced to 3 years imprisonment, Gamalat Soliman to 1 year in prison, and 19 others received suspended prison sentences for practicing beliefs deemed "deviant from Islamic Shari'a." In 2001 the State Emergency Court convicted 2 men on that charge (sentenced to 5 and 3 years in prison respectively); in March 2002, the Court convicted 8 persons (sentences ranged from 3 years in prison to suspended sentences); and in May 2002, a group of 21 persons were referred to trial in a State Security Emergency Court on the same charge; the trial was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

Law 263 for 1960 (decreed by President Gamal Abdel Nasser) bans Baha'i institutions and community activities. The Government confiscated all Baha'i community properties, including Baha'i centers, libraries, and cemeteries, and the ban has not been rescinded.

Political parties based on religion are illegal. Pursuant to this law, the Muslim Brotherhood is an illegal organization. Muslim Brothers speak openly and publicly about their views, although they do not explicitly identify themselves as members of the organization, and they remain subject to arbitrary treatment and pressure from the Government. Seventeen independent candidates backed by the Muslim Brotherhood were elected to the People's Assembly in the 2000 parliamentary elections, despite government-sponsored efforts to thwart them, which included mainly limiting access to polling stations but also, in some instances, violence, detentions and arrests.

There were no new cases of authors facing trial or charges related to writings or statements considered heretical during the period covered by this report. In July 2001, the Cairo Personal Status Court rejected a lawsuit against feminist author Nawal al-Sa'adawi, in which Islamist attorney Nabih al-Wahsh sought to force the divorce of al-Sa'adawi from her husband on the grounds of apostasy due to views she expressed regarding Muslim customs and beliefs.

Various ministries legally are authorized to ban or confiscate books and other works of art upon obtaining a court order. The Islamic Research Center at Al-Azhar University has legal authority to censor, but not to confiscate, all publications dealing with the Koran and Islamic scriptural texts. In previous years, the Center has passed judgment on the suitability of nonreligious books and artistic productions, but there were no new cases during the period covered by this report.

The local media, including pro-government papers and state TV, gives prominence to Islamic programming, which sometimes implies the primacy of Islam among “the heavenly religions.” For example, a program entitled “Essence of Life,” which airs twice a week on state-owned Nile TV, interviews people who have converted to Islam. The interviewer frequently praises his guests for improving their lives by having chosen “the right path.” Similarly, the religion page, which appears weekly in the prominent, pro-government daily al-Ahram, often reports on conversions to Islam and reports factually on how converts improved their lives and found peace and moral stability, things they said they lacked in their previous faith.

Since 1995 President Mubarak stated that the Government would not allow confiscation of books from the market without a court order, a position supported by the then-Mufti of the Republic, who is now the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar.

In 1997 human rights activist Mamdouh Naklah filed suit, seeking removal of the religious affiliation category from government identification cards. Naklah challenged the constitutionality of a 1994 decree by the Minister of Interior governing the issuance of new identification cards. A hearing scheduled for February 25 never took place. Upon his appearance, the court informed Naklah that the case documents had been withdrawn and forwarded to the president of the State’s Council, a highly unusual procedure. No new hearing date has been set, and it appears unlikely that the case will be heard.

The Constitution provides for equal public rights and duties without discrimination due to religion or creed, and in general, the Government upholds these constitutional protections; however, government discrimination against non-Muslims exists. There are no Christians serving as governors, presidents of public universities, or deans. There are few Christians in the upper ranks of the security services and armed forces. Although there has been improvement in a few areas, government discriminatory practices include: discrimination against Christians in the public sector; discrimination against Christians in staff appointments to public universities; payment of Muslim imams through public funds (Christian clergy are paid by private church funds); and refusal to admit Christians to Al-Azhar University (which is publicly funded). In general public university training programs for Arabic-language teachers refuse to admit non-Muslims because the curriculum involves the study of the Koran; however, in 2001 the first Christian graduated from an Arabic-language department at the Suez Canal University.

Anti-Semitic articles and editorials are published in privately owned papers and to a lesser extent, the pro-Government press. The Government reportedly has advised journalists and cartoonists to avoid anti-Semitism. However, government officials insist that manifestations of anti-Semitism in the media are a reaction to Israeli government actions against Palestinians and do not reflect historical anti-Semitism.

The Ministry of Culture contested a 2001 Alexandria court ruling in favor of a suit brought on by a local resident calling for cancellation of an annual Jewish celebration at the tomb of Rabbi Abu Hasira in the Delta on the grounds of indecency, as well as suspension of a Ministry of Culture decree declaring the tomb an antiquity site protected by the Government. The festival was not held in 2002 and the case was pending before a higher administrative court at the end of the period covered by this report.

Although the Coptic Orthodox Church won a lawsuit to reclaim several plots of land in greater Cairo in 2000, there continued to be no new returns during the period covered by this report.

According to a 1995 law, the application of family law, including marriage, divorce, alimony, child custody, and burial, is based on an individual’s religion. In the practice of family law, the State recognizes only the three “heavenly religions”: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Muslim families are subject to the Personal Status Law, which draws on Shari’a (Islamic law). Christian families are subject to canon law, and Jewish families are subject to Jewish law. In cases of family law disputes involving a marriage between a Christian woman and a Muslim man, the courts apply the Personal Status Law.

Under Shari’a non-Muslim males must convert to Islam to marry Muslim women, but non-Muslim women need not convert to marry Muslim men. Muslim women are prohibited from marrying Christian men.

Inheritance laws for all citizens are based on Shari’a. Muslim female heirs receive half the amount of a male heir’s inheritance, while Christian widows of Muslims have no inheritance rights. A sole female heir receives half her parents’ estate; the balance goes to designated male relatives. A sole male heir inherits all his parents’ property. Male Muslim heirs face strong social pressure to provide for all family members who require assistance; however, this assistance is not always provided. The 2000 Personal Status Law makes it easier for a Muslim woman to obtain a di-

voiced without her husband's consent, provided that she is willing to forego alimony and the return of her dowry.

The Coptic Orthodox Church excommunicates women members who marry Muslim men, and requires that other Christians convert to Coptic Orthodoxy in order to marry a member of the Church. The Coptic Orthodox Church permits divorce only in specific circumstances, such as adultery or conversion of one spouse to another religion.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government at times prosecutes members of religious groups whose practices deviate from mainstream Islamic beliefs, and whose activities are believed to jeopardize communal harmony. For example in 2002 eight persons were convicted of insulting a heavenly religion and received 3-year prison sentences.

In a February retrial of 50 men first arrested in Cairo in May 2001 on suspicion of homosexual activity, a criminal court convicted 21 of "habitual debauchery" and sentenced them to the maximum 3-year sentence. The verdict was pronounced although judges had not allowed any substantive discussion of the case during several hearings. In May 2002, President Mubarak ratified the verdicts against two men, who had allegedly advocated a belief system that combined Islam and tolerance for homosexuality and had been subsequently convicted of violating Article 98(F) and sentenced to 5 and 3 years in November 2001. Although he ratified the verdicts against 2 of the defendants, the president ordered the retrial of the remaining 50 in a regular criminal court; the State Security Emergency Court acquitted 29 of the 50; 20 others received 2-year sentences and 1 received a 1-year sentence for "habitual debauchery."

In May 2002, a State Security Emergency Court in Nasr City (in greater Cairo) began hearing the case of 21 persons accused of "insulting religion due to unorthodox Islamic beliefs and practices." During the trial, 17 of the defendants remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report, while 4 were released. The trial ended on September 28, 2002 with the conviction of Sayyed Tolba, Gamalat Soliman, and 19 others. Tolba received 3 years in prison, Soliman 1-year in prison, and the rest received 1 year suspended sentences.

In 2001 the Public Prosecutor ordered the release, pending an appeal, of author Ala'a Hamed, who had been convicted of insulting Islam in a novel in 1998; his appeal was pending at the end of the period covered by the report.

Neither the Constitution nor the Civil and Penal Codes prohibit proselytizing, but those accused of proselytizing have been harassed by police or arrested on charges of violating Article 98(F) of the Penal Code, which prohibits citizens from ridiculing or insulting heavenly religions or inciting sectarian strife.

While there are no legal restrictions on the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam, there are occasional reports that police harass Christians who had converted from Islam. The law prescribes steps to register the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam but does not recognize the conversion of Muslims to other religions. Converts to Islam are not permitted to revert to their original religion. The minor children of converts to Islam, and in some cases adult children, may automatically become classified as Muslims in the eyes of the state regardless of the status of the other spouse. This is in accordance with "established" Islamic Shari'a rule, which dictates "no jurisdiction of a non-Muslim over a Muslim."

In cases involving conversion from Islam to Christianity, authorities in the past also have charged several converts with violating laws prohibiting the falsification of documents. In such instances, converts, who fear government harassment if they officially register the change from Islam to Christianity, have altered their identification cards and other official documents themselves to reflect their new religious affiliation.

On December 29, 2002, Malak Fahmi, a Christian, and his wife Sarah, a Christian convert from Islam, were arrested while attempting to leave the country with their two children. The couple was charged with falsification of documents. Sarah, who reportedly changed her name and religious affiliation on her marriage certificate only, stated that she did so without her husband's assistance. On May 6, a judge ordered the renewal of their detention for another 45 days.

An estimated several thousand persons are imprisoned because of alleged support for or membership in Islamist groups seeking to overthrow the Government. The Government states that these persons are in detention because of membership in or activities on behalf of violent extremist groups, without regard to their religious affiliation. During the period covered by this report, security forces arrested several hundred persons allegedly associated with the banned Muslim Brotherhood. Most observers believe that the Government was seeking to undermine Muslim Brotherhood organization of pro-Palestinian and anti-U.S. and anti-Israel demonstrations.

In 2002 the Government arrested Muslim Brotherhood supporters following a People's Assembly by-election in Alexandria. President Mubarak referred three alleged extremist groups to trial before military tribunals.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion carried out by the Government; however, there were reports of forced conversions of Coptic girls to Islam by Muslim men. Reports of such cases are disputed and often include inflammatory allegations and categorical denials of kidnapping and rape. Observers, including human rights groups, find it extremely difficult to determine whether compulsion was used, as most cases involve a Coptic girl who converts to Islam when she marries a Muslim boy. Reports of such cases almost never appear in the local media. According to the Government, in such cases the girl must meet with her family, with her priest, and with the head of her church before she is allowed to convert. However, there are credible reports of government harassment of or lack of cooperation with Christian families that attempt to regain custody of their daughters, and of the failure of the authorities to uphold the law (which states that a marriage of a girl under the age of 16 is prohibited, and between the ages of 16 and 21 is illegal, without the approval and presence of her guardian) in cases of marriage between an underage Christian girl and a Muslim boy.

Although some Coptic activists maintain that government officials do not respond effectively to instances of alleged kidnapping, in April police in Minya intervened in the case of Nivine Malak Kamel, a 17-year-old Christian girl allegedly kidnapped by Muslim Reda Hussan Abu Zeid. In May police returned her to her family.

There were no reports of the forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, the Government took several steps to promote and improve religious freedom and tolerance. Following the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States, and the increase in Israeli-Palestinian violence, government religious institutions such as Al-Azhar accelerated a schedule of interfaith discussions inside the country and abroad. The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Tantawi, and Coptic Orthodox Pope Shenouda participated in joint public events, such as a May meeting hosted by the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs at which the Pope was invited to deliver an address.

In September 2002, the Joint Dialogue Commission of the Anglican Church and al-Azhar University held its second annual meeting. Participants agreed that peace was inseparable from justice, stated that "acceptance of the other" must be promoted, and reaffirmed their commitment to joint action for peace, justice, and mutual respect.

In October 2002, a prominent Coptic NGO, in cooperation with the Egyptian Ministry of Awqaf (Islamic Religious Endowments), held a two-day seminar at which Muslim scholars, evangelical pastors, and intellectuals from both communities participated.

During the period covered by this report, the Government continued to take steps to contain incidents of sectarian tension. In a number of cases reported in the media, Government officials participated in the consecration ceremonies for new churches. For example, in February, the Governor of Sohag and other officials, including a representative of the Ministry of Awqaf along with other Islamic figures, participated with the Bishop of Tahta, Sohag, in laying the cornerstone for the Mar Guirguis church in Tahta. In January Pope Shenouda and Minister of Culture Farouk Hosny consecrated a church in the Red Sea governorate. In December 2002, the Governor of Qena province participated with Orthodox clergy in a ceremony laying the cornerstone for the Virgin Mary church in Naga' Hammadi.

In December 2002, President Mubarak announced that January 7, Christmas on the Eastern calendar, would henceforth be a national holiday. Pope Shenouda, other Christian leaders, and the Muslim community warmly welcomed the move as an important symbol of acknowledgment of the rights and status of Christians in society. Subsequently, Gamal Mubarak, son of the president and a senior figure in the ruling National Democratic Party, attended Christmas Eve services, a move interpreted as a demonstration of interfaith tolerance.

In March 2002, the Government and the American NGO Athra Kadisha completed the Basatin cemetery bridge. The project, on which negotiations began in 1989, is a modern highway—part of Cairo's Ring Road—that traverses a cemetery but respects Jewish religious strictures against moving or disturbing burial sites.

Government-owned television and radio continued to provide programming time devoted to Christian issues, including live broadcast of Christmas and Easter services. Excerpts from Coptic Orthodox Pope Shenouda's weekly public addresses, documentaries on the country's monasteries, the travels of the Holy Family and other aspects of Christian history, and discussions among Muslims and Christians of local and international topics including discrimination appeared regularly in pro-government newspapers. Christian clergy spoke on popular television programs such as "Good Morning Egypt" about current topics and Christian religious beliefs. A version of Sesame Street especially designed for the country by the Children's Television Workshop with U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) assistance that began in August 2000, gained broad viewership among young children and many of their parents. Among the aims of the program is the promotion of tolerance, and one of the principal characters is a Christian.

Government and independent newspapers published a broad spectrum of news and views on religious topics, particularly following the terrorist attacks against the United States in September 2001. The government-run printing house Dar al-Ma'arif published for sale a new edition of the four Christian gospels, resuming a practice that had stopped decades ago.

The Minister of Education has developed and distributed curricular materials instructing teachers in government schools to discuss and promote tolerance in teaching. Government schools began using a new curriculum on the Coptic and Byzantine periods of Egyptian history, developed with the advice and support of Christian intellectuals and the Coptic Orthodox Church.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Muslims and Christians share a common history and national identity. They also share the same ethnicity, race, culture, and language. Christians are geographically dispersed throughout the country, and Christians and Muslims live as neighbors. However, at times religious tensions flare up, individual acts of prejudice occur, and members of both faiths practice discrimination.

In February 2002, Muslim residents attacked and damaged a church in the village of Bani Walmiss. During the period covered by this report, the Government funded the repair of the church, and it officially reopened.

In July 2000, gunmen killed Christian farmer Magdy Ayyad Mus'ad and wounded five other persons in Giza province, allegedly because of objections to a church Mus'ad built. Authorities charged a person with the killing but released the suspect on bail in October 2000; by the end of the period covered by this report, no trial date had been set.

In December 2000, Father Hezkiyal Ghebriyal, a 75-year-old Coptic Orthodox priest, was stabbed and seriously wounded in the village of Bardis, near Sohag. Police arrested the suspected attacker. At the end of the period covered by this report, the suspect remained in prison pending an ongoing investigation.

The case of Ahmad and Ibrahim Nasir, who were sentenced to 7 years in prison for the September 1999 murder of a monk in Assiyut, remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report. The Court of Cassation had not yet set a date to hear an appeal by the Public Prosecutor seeking a heavier sentence.

On June 23, 2002, a State Security Court in Assiyut began hearing the trial of Mohammed Abdel Azim, accused of participating in the killing of 13 Christians in the village of Sanbo in March 1992. Abdel Azim had been sentenced in absentia to 3 years in prison in 1994. Saudi Arabia extradited him to Egypt in late 2001. The case was transferred in early 2003 to a regular criminal court and the next hearing is scheduled for later in the year.

On February 27, the retrial of 96 defendants tried in connection with the December 1999–January 2000 violence, which left 21 Christians and 1 Muslim dead in the village of Al-Kush, ended with the acquittal of 93 and the conviction of 3. Of the three convicted, one Muslim defendant was found guilty of killing the sole Muslim victim (mistaken for a Christian), and was sentenced to 3 years. A third was convicted of destruction of property. Charges against a fourth deceased defendant were dropped. On March 13, the Egyptian Office of the Public Prosecutor, unsatisfied with the failure to hold any persons responsible for the deaths of the Christians, appealed the case to the Court of Cassation. During the period covered by this report, no date had been set for the Court to hear the case.

While there is no legal requirement for a Christian girl or woman to convert to Islam in order to marry a Muslim (see Section II), conversion to Islam is sometimes used to circumvent the legal prohibition on marriage between the ages of 16 and 21 without the approval and presence of the girl's guardian. Most Christian families would object to a daughter's wish to marry a Muslim, and if a Christian woman

marries a Muslim man, the Church excommunicates her. Local authorities sometimes allow custody of a minor Christian female who converts to Islam to be transferred to a Muslim custodian, who is likely to grant approval for an underage marriage. The law is silent on the matter of the acceptable age of conversion. Ignorance of the law and social pressure, including the centrality of marriage to a woman's identity, often affect a girl's decision to convert (see Section II). Family conflict and financial pressure also are cited as factors.

Official relations between Christian and Muslim religious figures are amicable, and include reciprocal visits to religious celebrations. Al-Azhar and the Ministry of Awqaf engage in frequent public and private interfaith discussions with Christians of various denominations, both within the country and in other countries. NGOs such as the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) are active in organizing formal and informal interfaith events; CEOSS held such events in September and October 2002, and in March with the participation of Al-Azhar, the Ministry of Awqaf, and Christian clerics. In these events, Muslim and Christian youth met to discuss issues such as citizenship, media affairs, and societal violence. Private Christian schools admit Muslim students, and religious charities serve both communities.

Anti-Semitic articles, which can be found in both the pro-government press and in the press of the opposition parties, increased late in 2000 and again in 2001 following the outbreak of violence in Israel and the occupied territories. There have been no violent anti-Semitic incidents in recent years directed at the tiny Jewish community still residing in Egypt.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The subject of religious freedom is an important part of the bilateral dialogue. The subject has been raised at all levels of government, including by the President, Secretary of State, Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, the U.S. Ambassador, and other embassy officials. The Embassy maintains formal contacts with the Office of Human Rights at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition the Ambassador has discussed religious freedom with senior government officials and religious leaders. The Embassy also discusses religious freedom issues regularly in contacts with other government officials, including governors and Members of Parliament. The Ambassador also has made public statements supporting interfaith understanding and efforts toward harmony and equality among Egyptians of all faiths. Visiting congressional delegations have raised religious freedom issues during visits with government officials.

The U.S. Embassy maintains an active dialogue with the leaders of the Christian and Muslim religious communities, human rights groups, and other activists. The Embassy investigates every complaint of religious discrimination brought to its attention. The Embassy also discusses religious freedom with a range of contacts, including academics, businessmen, and citizens outside of the capital area. Mission officials actively challenge anti-Semitic articles in the media through immediate contacts with editors-in-chief. For example, the Ambassador and various other Embassy officers met with government officials to express U.S. dismay at the anti-Semitic themes portrayed in the TV series "Horseman Without a Horse."

The U.S. Mission, including the Department of State and USAID, works to expand human rights and to ameliorate the conditions that contribute to religious strife by promoting economic, social, and political development. U.S. programs and activities support initiatives in several areas directly related to religious freedom.

The Mission is working to strengthen civil society, supporting secular channels and the broadening of a civic culture that promote religious tolerance. An inter-agency small-grants program managed by the U.S. Embassy in Cairo supports projects that promote tolerance and mutual respect between Muslims and Coptic Christians.

The U.S. Mission also promotes civic education. The public affairs section of the Embassy supports the development of materials that encourage tolerance, diversity, and understanding of others, in both Arabic-language and English-language curriculums. USAID, in collaboration with the Children's Television Workshop, developed an Egyptian version of the television program *Sesame Street*, which is designed to reach remote households and has as one of its goals the promotion of tolerance, including among different religions. The program began broadcasting in August 2000; in 2002 household survey data showed that it was reaching more than 90 percent of elementary school-aged children (see Section II). The State Department is currently funding a program for journalists that promotes balanced, fact-based reporting as a means to mitigate and reduce social conflict.

USAID also supports private voluntary organizations that are implementing innovative curriculums in private schools. The public affairs section of the Embassy is leading an effort to increase the professionalism of the press, with an emphasis on balanced and responsible coverage. Finally USAID is working with the Supreme Council of Antiquities to promote the conservation of cultural antiquities, including Islamic, Christian, and Jewish historical sites.

IRAN¹

The Constitution declares the “official religion of Iran is Islam and the doctrine followed is that of Ja’fari (Twelver) Shi’ism.” The Government restricts freedom of religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Members of the country’s religious minorities—including Baha’is, Jews, Christians, and Sunni and Sufi Muslims—reported imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on their religious beliefs.

Non-Muslim communities, some of which predate Islam, are present; however, government actions create a threatening atmosphere for some religious minorities, especially Baha’is, Jews, and evangelical Christians.

The U.S. Government makes clear its objections to the Government’s treatment of religious minorities in public statements, through support for relevant U.N. and nongovernmental organization (NGO) efforts, and through diplomatic initiatives among all states concerned about religious freedom in Iran.

In March 2003, the Secretary of State designated the country as a Country of Particular Concern under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. This action followed three similar designations in 1999, 2000, and 2001.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 631,663 square miles, and its population is approximately 68 million. The population is approximately 99 percent Muslim, of which 89 percent are Shi’a and 10 percent Sunni (mostly Turkomen, Arabs, Baluchs, and Kurds living in the southwest, southeast, and northwest). Sufi Brotherhoods are popular, but there are no reliable figures available regarding the size of the Sufi population.

Baha’is, Christians, Zoroastrians, Mandaeans, and Jews constitute less than 1 percent of the population. The largest non-Muslim minority is the Baha’i community, which has an estimated 300,000 to 350,000 adherents throughout the country. Estimates on the size of the Jewish community vary from 20,000 to 30,000. These figures represent a substantial reduction from the estimated 75,000 to 80,000 Jews who resided in the country prior to the 1979 Iranian revolution. There are approximately 300,000 Christians in the country, according to U.N. figures, the majority of whom are ethnic Armenians and Assyro-Chaldeans. There also are Protestant denominations, including evangelical churches. The U.N. Special Representative (UNSR) reported that Christians are emigrating at an estimated rate of 15,000 to 20,000 per year. The Mandaeans, a community whose religion draws on pre-Christian gnostic beliefs, number approximately 5,000 to 10,000 persons, with members residing primarily in Khuzestan in the southwest.

The Government estimates the Zoroastrian community at 35,000 adherents; however, Zoroastrian groups cite a larger figure of approximately 60,000. Zoroastrians mainly are ethnic Persians and are concentrated in the cities of Tehran, Kerman, and Yazd. Zoroastrianism was the official religion of the pre-Islamic Sassanid Empire and thus played a central role in the country’s history.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Government restricts freedom of religion. The Constitution declares the “official religion of Iran is Islam and the doctrine followed is that of Ja’fari (Twelver) Shi’ism.” All laws and regulations must be consistent with Islamic law (Shari’a). The Constitution also states that other Islamic denominations are to be accorded full respect, and recognizes only Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians as religious mi-

¹The United States does not have an embassy in Iran. This report draws heavily upon non-U.S. Government sources.

norities, guaranteeing their right to religious practice in personal affairs and religious education. The Constitution forbids harassment of individuals according to their beliefs; however, the adherents of religions not specifically protected under the Constitution do not enjoy the freedom to practice. This restriction most acutely affects adherents of the Baha'i Faith, which the Government regards as a misguided or wayward Islamic sect with a political orientation that is antagonistic to the Iranian revolution; however, Baha'is view themselves as an independent religion with origins in the Shi'ite Islamic tradition. Government officials reportedly have stated that, as individuals, all Baha'is are entitled to their beliefs and are protected under other articles of the Constitution as citizens.

The Government rules by a religious jurisconsult. The Supreme Leader of Iran, chosen by a group of 83 Islamic scholars, oversees the state's decision-making process. All acts of the Majlis (legislative body) must be reviewed for conformity with Islamic law and the Constitution by the Council of Guardians, which is composed of six clerics appointed by the Supreme Leader and six Muslim jurists (legal scholars) nominated by the Head of the Judiciary and elected by parliament.

The Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance ("Ershad") and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) monitor religious activity closely. Adherents of recognized religious minorities are not required to register individually with the Government; however, their community, religious, and cultural events and organizations, including schools, are monitored closely. Registration of Baha'is is a police function. The Government has pressured evangelical Christian groups to compile and submit membership lists for their congregations, but evangelicals have resisted this demand. Non-Muslim owners of grocery shops are required to indicate their religious affiliation on the fronts of their shops.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Religious minorities, by law and practice, are barred from being elected to a representative body (except to the seats in the Majlis reserved for minorities, as provided for in the Constitution) and from holding senior government or military positions. Members of religious minorities are allowed to vote, but they may not run for President. All religious minorities suffer varying degrees of officially sanctioned discrimination, particularly in the areas of employment, education, and housing.

The Government does not guarantee the right of citizens to change or renounce their religious faith. Apostasy, specifically conversion from Islam, can be punishable by death.

Members of religious minorities are barred from serving in the judiciary and security services and from becoming public school principals. Applicants for public sector employment are screened for their adherence to and knowledge of Islam. Government workers who do not observe Islam's principles and rules are subject to penalties. The Constitution states that the country's army must be Islamic and must recruit individuals who are committed to the objectives of the Islamic revolution.

University applicants are required to pass an examination in Islamic theology, which limits the access of most religious minorities to higher education, although all public school students, including non-Muslims, must study Islam. The Government generally allows recognized religious minorities to conduct religious education for their adherents. This includes separate and privately funded Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian schools but does not include official Baha'i schools. The Ministry of Education, which imposes certain curriculum requirements, supervises these schools. With few exceptions, the directors of such private schools must be Muslim. Attendance at the schools is not mandatory for recognized religious minorities. The Ministry of Education must approve for use all textbooks used in coursework, including religious texts. Recognized religious minorities may provide religious instruction in non-Persian languages, but such texts require approval by the authorities for use. This requirement sometimes imposes significant translation expenses on minority communities.

The legal system also discriminates against religious minorities, who receive lower awards than Muslims in injury and death lawsuits and incur heavier punishments. The Guardian Council rejected a bill passed by the Majlis in November 2002 to equalize the payment of "blood money" between Muslim and non-Muslim men. All women and Baha'i men were excluded from the equalization provisions of the bill.

Although the Constitution provides Sunni Muslims religious freedom, some groups claim that the Government discriminates. In particular, Sunnis cite the lack of a Sunni mosque in Tehran and claim that authorities refuse to authorize construction of a Sunni place of worship in the capitol. Sunnis also have cited obstacles to reaching senior governmental positions and accused the state broadcasting company of airing programming insulting to Sunnis.

The Baha'i Faith originated in the country during the 1840's as a reformist movement within Shi'a Islam. Baha'is are considered apostates because of their claim to a valid religious revelation subsequent to that of Mohammed, despite the fact that Baha'is do not consider themselves to be Muslim. The Baha'i Faith is defined by the Government as a political "sect," linked to the Pahlavi regime and, hence, counterrevolutionary.

In 1993 the UNSR reported the existence of a government policy directive regarding the Baha'is. According to the directive, the Supreme Revolutionary Council instructed government agencies to block the progress and development of the Baha'i community, expel Baha'i students from universities, cut Baha'i links with groups outside the country, restrict employment of Baha'is, and deny Baha'is "positions of influence," including in education. The Government claims that the directive is a forgery.

A 2001 Ministry of Justice report demonstrates that government policy continued to aim for the eventual elimination of the Baha'is as a community. It stated in part that Baha'is would only be permitted to enroll in schools if they did not identify themselves as Baha'is, and that Baha'is preferably should be enrolled in schools that have a strong and imposing religious ideology. The report also stated that Baha'is must be expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that they are Baha'is.

Baha'is may not teach or practice their faith or maintain links with co-religionists abroad. The fact that the Baha'i world headquarters (established by the founder of the Baha'i Faith in the 19th century, in what was then Ottoman-controlled Palestine) is situated in what is now the state of Israel, exposes Baha'is to government charges of "espionage on behalf of Zionism," in particular when caught communicating with or sending monetary contributions to the Baha'i headquarters.

Baha'is are banned from government employment. In addition, Baha'is regularly are denied compensation for injury or criminal victimization.

The Government allows recognized religious minorities to establish community centers and certain cultural, social, athletic, or charitable associations that they finance themselves. However, the Government prohibits the Baha'i community from official assembly or from maintaining administrative institutions. Because the Baha'i Faith has no clergy, the denial of the right to form such institutions and elect officers threatens its existence in the country.

Broad restrictions on Baha'is undermine their ability to function as a community. Baha'is repeatedly have been offered relief from mistreatment in exchange for recanting their faith. Baha'i cemeteries, holy places, historical sites, administrative centers, and other assets were seized shortly after the 1979 Revolution. None of the properties have been returned, and many have been destroyed.

Baha'is are not allowed to bury and honor their dead in keeping with their religious tradition. In 2002 the Government offered the Tehran Baha'i community a plot of land for use as a cemetery; however, the land was in the desert, with no access to water, making it impossible to perform Baha'i mourning rituals. In addition, the Government stipulated that no markers be put on individual graves and that no mortuary facilities be built on the site, making it impossible to perform a ceremonial burial in the Baha'i tradition.

Baha'i group meetings and religious education, which often take place in private homes and offices, are curtailed severely. Public and private universities continue to deny admittance to Baha'i students.

Over the past several years, the Government has taken a few positive steps in recognizing the rights of Baha'is, as well as other religious minorities. For example, in recent years the Government has eased some restrictions, permitting Baha'is to obtain food-ration booklets and send their children to public elementary and secondary schools. In 1999 President Khatami publicly stated that no one should be persecuted because of his or her religious beliefs. He vowed to defend the civil rights of all citizens, regardless of their beliefs or religion. Subsequently, the Expediency Council approved the "Right of Citizenship" bill, affirming the social and political rights of all citizens and their equality before the law. In February 2000, following approval of the bill, the head of the Judiciary issued a circular letter to all registry offices throughout the country allowing couples to be registered as husband and wife without being required to state their religious affiliation. The measure effectively permits the registration of Baha'i marriages. Previously, Baha'i marriages were not recognized by the Government, leaving Baha'i women open to charges of prostitution. Children of Baha'i marriages had not been recognized as legitimate and were therefore denied inheritance rights.

While Jews are a recognized religious minority, allegations of official discrimination are frequent. The Government's anti-Israel policies, along with a perception among radical Muslims that all Jewish citizens support Zionism and the State of

Israel, create a threatening atmosphere for the small community. Jewish leaders reportedly are reluctant to draw attention to official mistreatment of their community due to fear of government reprisal.

In principle, but with some exceptions, there is little restriction of, or interference with, the Jewish religious practice. However, education of Jewish children has become more difficult in recent years. The Government reportedly allows Hebrew instruction, recognizing that it is necessary for Jewish religious practice. However, it strongly discourages the distribution of Hebrew texts, in practice making it difficult to teach the language. Moreover, the Government has required that several Jewish schools remain open on Saturdays, the Jewish Sabbath, in conformity with the schedule of other schools in the school system. Because working or attending school on the Sabbath violates Jewish law, this requirement has made it impossible for observant Jews to both attend school and adhere to a fundamental tenet of their religious law.

Jews are permitted to obtain passports and to travel outside the country, but often are denied the multiple-exit permits that normally are issued to citizens. With the exception of certain business travelers, the authorities require Jews to obtain clearance (and pay additional fees) before each trip abroad. The Government appears concerned about the emigration of Jews and permission generally is not granted for all members of a Jewish family to travel outside the country at the same time. One seat in the Majlis is currently reserved for a Jewish representative.

According to the U.N. High Commission for Refugees' (UNHCR) Background Paper on Iran, the Mandaeans are regarded as Christians and are included among the country's three recognized religious minorities. However, Mandaeans regard themselves not as Christians, but as adherents of a religion that predates Christianity in both belief and practice. Mandaeans enjoyed official support as a distinct religion prior to the Revolution, but their legal status as a religion since then has been the subject of debate in the Majlis and never has been clarified. The small community faces discrimination similar to that faced by the country's other religious minorities.

Sufi organizations outside the country remain concerned about government repression of Sufi religious practices.

The Government enforces gender segregation in most public spaces and prohibits women from interacting openly with unmarried men or men not related to them. Women must ride in a reserved section on public buses and enter public buildings, universities, and airports through separate entrances. Women are prohibited from attending male sporting events, although this restriction does not appear to be enforced universally. Conservative Islamic dress rules have eased somewhat in recent years; however, women are not free to choose what they wear in public. Women are subject to harassment by the authorities if their dress or behavior is considered inappropriate and may be sentenced to flogging or imprisonment for such violations. The law prohibits the publication of pictures of uncovered women in the print media, including pictures of foreign women. There are penalties for failure to observe Islamic dress codes at work.

The law provides for segregation of the sexes in medical care. Only female physicians can treat women; however, women reportedly often receive inferior care because of the imbalance between the number of trained and licensed male and female physicians and specialists.

The testimony of a woman is worth only half that of a man in court. A married woman must obtain the written consent of her husband before traveling outside the country. The law provides for stoning for adultery; however, in 2002 the Government suspended its practice.

All women, no matter the age, must have the permission of their father or a living male relative in order to marry. The law allows for the practice of *Siqeh*, or temporary marriage, a Shi'a custom in which a woman or a girl may become the wife of a married or single Muslim male after a simple and brief religious ceremony. The bond is not recorded on identification documents, and, according to Islamic law, men may have as many *Siqeh* wives as they wish. Such wives usually are not granted rights associated with traditional marriage.

Women have the right to divorce, and regulations promulgated in 1984 substantially broadened the grounds on which a woman may seek a divorce. However, a husband is not required to cite a reason for divorcing his wife. In 1986 the Government issued a 12-point "contract" to serve as a model for marriage and divorce, which limits the privileges accorded to men by custom and traditional interpretations of Islamic law. The model contract also recognized a divorced woman's right to a share in the property that couples acquire during their marriage and to increased alimony rights. Women who remarry are forced to give up custody of children from earlier marriages to the child's father. In 1998 the Majlis passed a law

that granted custody of minor children to the mother in certain divorce cases in which the father is proven unfit to care for the child. The measure was enacted because of the complaints of mothers who had lost custody of their children to former husbands with drug addictions and criminal records.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

According to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, since 1979 more than 200 Baha'is have been killed and 15 have disappeared and are presumed dead. The Government continued to imprison and detain Baha'is based on their religious beliefs.

The Government appears to keep a small number of Baha'is in arbitrary detention, some at risk of execution, at any given time. There reportedly were four Baha'is in prison for practicing their faith at the end of the period covered by this report, one facing a life sentence, two facing sentences of 15 years, and one a 4-year sentence. In addition, the Government harasses the Baha'i community by arresting Baha'is arbitrarily, charging them, and then releasing them, often without dropping the charges against them. Those with charges still pending against them fear arrest at any time.

According to Baha'i sources in the United States, 23 Baha'is from 18 different localities were arbitrarily arrested and detained for a short time since June 2002, simply because of their Baha'i faith. None of these individuals are currently in prison.

Manuchehr Khulusi was arrested for unknown reasons in 1999 and imprisoned and sentenced to death in 2000. During his imprisonment, Khulusi reportedly was interrogated, beaten, held in solitary confinement, and denied access to his lawyer. In 2002 the Revolutionary Court of Mashhad abrogated the suspension of his imprisonment and sentenced him to 4 years in prison, once again due to his participation in Baha'i activities. He was re-imprisoned in March 2003.

In May 2003, Musa Talibi, who had originally been arrested in 1994 and sentenced to death for apostasy, was released from prison in Isfahan. Upon his release, Talibi received no official explanation as to his status. As in the case of Khulusi, he may be subject to re-arrest at any time.

Two Baha'is, Sirus Zabihi-Moghaddam and Hadayat Kashefi-Najafabadi, were tried in 1998 and later sentenced to death by a revolutionary court in Mashhad for practicing their faith. In 2000 the sentences were reduced to 7 and 5 years, respectively. Kashefi-Najafabadi was released in October 2001, after serving 4 years of his sentence. Zabihi-Moghaddam, who originally was arrested in November 1997, was released in June 2002.

Government action against Baha'i education continued during the period covered by this report. In 1998 the Government raided more than 500 Baha'i homes and offices affiliated with the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education nationwide, arresting numerous members of the faculty and staff. Also known as the "Open University," the Baha'i community established the Institute shortly after the Revolution to offer higher educational opportunities to Baha'i students denied access to the country's high schools and universities. In mid-2002 the Institute's qualifying exams were disrupted when Revolutionary Guards raided eight exam sites in several different cities, including Shiraz and Mashhad. The exams and books of most students were confiscated. At the same time, 17 Baha'is attending a summer camp were arrested and questioned before being released.

The property rights of Baha'is generally are disregarded and they suffer frequent government harassment and persecution. Since 1979 the Government has confiscated large numbers of private and business properties belonging to Baha'is. According to Baha'i sources, an Islamic Revolutionary Court recently rejected the appeal of a Bahai for the return of his confiscated property on the grounds that he held Baha'i classes in his home and had a library of over 900 Baha'i books. Numerous Baha'i homes reportedly have been seized and handed over to an agency of Supreme Leader Khamene'i. Sources indicate that property was confiscated in Rafsanjan, Kerman, Marv-Dasht, and Yazd. Several Baha'i farmers in southern Iran were arrested, and one who was jailed for several days was only freed after paying a "fine." Authorities reportedly also confiscated Baha'i properties in Kata, forced several families to leave their homes and farmlands, imprisoned some farmers, and did not permit others to harvest their crops. In one instance, a Baha'i woman from Isfahan who legally traveled abroad found that her home had been confiscated when she returned home. The Government also has seized private homes in which Baha'i youth classes were held despite the owners having proper ownership documents. The Government's seizure of Baha'i personal property and its denial of Baha'i access to education and employment are eroding the economic base of the Baha'i community.

It has become somewhat easier for Baha'is to obtain passports. In addition, some Iranian embassies abroad do not require applicants to state a religious affiliation. In such cases, it is easier for Baha'is to renew passports. However, in February 2001, the Government denied Iranian entry visas to Baha'i delegation participants attending the Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Conference for the World Conference on Racism, held in Tehran. The delegation was composed of American, Japanese, South Korean, and Indian nationals.

The Government vigilantly enforces its prohibition on proselytizing activities by evangelical Christians by closing evangelical churches and arresting converts. Members of evangelical congregations have been required to carry membership cards, photocopies of which must be provided to the authorities. Worshipers are subject to identity checks by authorities posted outside congregation centers. The Government has restricted meetings for evangelical services to Sundays, and church officials have been ordered to inform the Ministry of Information and Islamic Guidance before admitting new members to their congregations.

Conversion of a Muslim to a non-Muslim religion is considered apostasy under Shari'a law as enforced in the country, and non-Muslims may not proselytize Muslims without putting their own lives at risk. Evangelical church leaders are subject to pressure from authorities to sign pledges that they would not evangelize Muslims or allow Muslims to attend church services.

Mistreatment of evangelical Christians continued during the period covered by this report. Christian groups have reported instances of government harassment of churchgoers in Tehran, in particular against worshippers at the Assembly of God congregation in the capitol. Harassment has included conspicuous monitoring outside Christian premises by Revolutionary Guards to discourage Muslims or converts from entering church premises and demands for the presentation of the identity papers of worshippers inside.

Some Jewish groups outside the country cite an increase in anti-Semitic propaganda in the official and semiofficial media as adding to the pressure felt by the Jewish community. One example cited is the periodic publication of the anti-Semitic and fictitious "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," both by the Government and by periodicals associated with hard-line elements of the regime.

In 2000 10 of 13 Jews arrested in 1999 were convicted on charges of illegal contact with Israel, conspiracy to form an illegal organization, and recruiting agents. Along with two Muslim defendants, the 10 Jews received prison sentences ranging from 4 to 13 years. An appeals court subsequently overturned the convictions for forming an illegal organization and recruiting agents, but upheld the convictions for illegal contacts with Israel with reduced sentences. One of the 10 was released in February 2001 and another in January 2002, both upon completion of their prison terms. Three additional prisoners were released before the end of their sentences in October 2002. In April 2003, it was announced that the last five were to be released. It is not clear if the eight who were released before the completion of their sentences were fully pardoned, or were released provisionally.

During and since the trial, Jewish businesses in Tehran and Shiraz have been targets of vandalism and boycotts and Jews reportedly have suffered personal harassment and intimidation.

In 2002 the group Families of Iranian Jewish Prisoners (FIJP) published the names of 12 Iranian Jews who disappeared while attempting to escape from the country in the 1990s. The families continued to report anecdotal evidence that some of the men are in Iranian prisons. The Government never has provided any information regarding their whereabouts and has not charged any of them with crimes. FIJP believes that the Government has dealt with these cases differently than it has with other similar cases because the persons involved are Jewish.

Numerous Sunni clerics have been killed in recent years, some allegedly by government agents.

There were no reports of government harassment of the Zoroastrian community during the period covered by this report.

The Government carefully monitors the statements and views of the country's senior Shi'a religious leaders. It has restricted the movement of several who have been under house arrest for years, including Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, who was released from 5 years of house arrest in January 2003.

The Special Clerical Court (SCC) system, which was established in 1987 to investigate offenses and crimes committed by clerics, and which the Supreme Leader oversees directly, is not provided for in the Constitution, and operates outside the domain of the judiciary. In particular, critics alleged that the clerical courts were used to prosecute certain clerics for expressing controversial ideas and for participating in activities outside the area of religion, including journalism.

In November 1999, former Interior Minister and Vice President Abdollah Nouri was sentenced by a branch of the SCC to a 5-year prison term for allegedly publishing “anti-Islamic” articles, insulting government officials, promoting friendly relations with the United States, and providing illegal publicity to dissident cleric Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri in the pages of *Khordad*, a newspaper that was established by Nouri in late 1998 and closed at the time of his arrest. Nouri used the public trial to attack the legitimacy of the SCC. In November 2002, Nouri was pardoned by the Supreme Leader and released from prison after his brother, Member of Parliament Ali Reza Nouri, died in a car accident.

Laws based on religion have been used to stifle freedom of expression. Independent newspapers and magazines have been closed, and leading publishers and journalists were imprisoned on vague charges of “insulting Islam” or “calling into question the Islamic foundation of the Republic.” In November 2002, Iranian academic Hashem Aghajari was sentenced to death for blasphemy against the Prophet Mohammed, based on a speech in June 2002 in which he challenged Muslims not to blindly follow the clergy, provoking an international and domestic outcry. His death sentence was revoked by the Supreme Court in February 2003, but the case was sent back to the lower court for retrial. No verdict was issued at the time of this report.

Forced Religious Conversions

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States. However, a child born to a Muslim father automatically is considered a Muslim.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The continuous presence of the country’s pre-Islamic, non-Muslim communities, such as Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians, has accustomed the population to the participation of non-Muslims in society. However, government actions create a threatening atmosphere for some religious minorities.

The Jewish community has been reduced to less than one-half of its pre-revolutionary size. Some of this emigration is connected with the larger, general waves of departures following the establishment of the Islamic Republic, but some also stems from continued perceived anti-Semitism on the part of the Government and within society.

The Government’s anti-Israel policies and the trial of the 13 Jews in 2000, along with the perception among some of the country’s radicalized elements that Iranian Jews support Zionism and the State of Israel, created a threatening atmosphere for the Jewish community (see Section II). Many Jews have sought to limit their contact with or support for the State of Israel out of fear of reprisal. Recent anti-American and anti-Israeli demonstrations have included the denunciation of “Jews,” as opposed to the past practice of denouncing only “Israel” and “Zionism,” adding to the threatening atmosphere for the community.

Sunni Muslims encounter religious discrimination at the local level, and there were reports of discrimination against practitioners of the Sufi tradition during the period covered by this report.

In a March 2002 meeting at the Vatican with Pope John Paul II, Speaker of the Majlis Mahdi Karrubi called for the expansion of Tehran-Vatican ties and said that dialog among religions can promote the restoration of peace and the elimination of violence in the world. In June 2002, Mohammad Khamenei, brother of the Supreme Leader, told the Pope in a Vatican meeting that dialog among religions was an ideal means for establishing global peace and justice. In June 2003, an interfaith delegation of U.S. Christians, Jews, and Muslims traveled to Iran to meet with Iranian religious, political, and cultural leaders.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The United States has no diplomatic relations with Iran and thus cannot raise directly with the Government the restrictions the Government places on religious freedom and other abuses that it commits against adherents of minority religions. The U.S. Government makes its position clear in public statements and reports, support for relevant U.N. and NGO efforts, and diplomatic initiatives to press for an end to Iranian government abuses.

From 1982 to 2001, the U.S. Government co-sponsored a resolution each year regarding the human rights situation in the country offered by the European Union at the annual meeting of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR). It passed every year until 2002, when the United States did not sit on the Commission

and the resolution failed passage by one vote. The U.S. has supported a similar resolution offered each year during the U.N. General Assembly until the fall of 2002, when no resolution was tabled. The U.S. Government strongly supported the work of the UN Special Rapporteur (UNSR) on Human Rights for Iran and called on the Iranian Government to grant him admission and allow him to conduct his research during the period of his mandate, which expired with the defeat of the resolution at the Commission on Human Rights in 2002. There was also no resolution on Iran at the UNCHR in the spring of 2003.

The U.S. State Department spokesman on numerous occasions has addressed the situation of the Baha'i and Jewish communities. The U.S. Government has encouraged other governments to make similar statements and has urged those governments to raise the issue of religious freedom in discussions with the Iranian Government.

In March 2003, the Secretary of State again designated Iran as a country of particular concern under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The Secretary of State had similarly designated Iran in 1999, 2000, and 2001.

IRAQ

The Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein was militarily overthrown by a U.S.-led Coalition in Operation Iraqi Freedom on April 9, 2003. UN Security Council Resolutions 1483, 1500, and 1511 provide that the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) administer the country, working closely with the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), until "an internationally recognized, representative government established by the Iraqi people is sworn in and assumes the responsibilities of the Authority." This report covers religious freedom under the Saddam Hussein regime, which was in control of Iraq for most of the reporting period.

Under the former regime, an interim constitution provided for individual freedom of religion if it did not violate "morality and public order." However, in practice, the Saddam regime severely limited freedom of religion, repressed the Shi'a religious leadership, and sought to exploit religious differences for political purposes.¹

Islam is the majority religion in Iraq, though other religions are practiced. The Government exercised repressive measures against any religious groupings or organizations that were deemed as not providing full political and social support to the regime.

Although Shi'a Arabs are the largest religious group, Sunni Arabs dominated economic and political life during the Hussein regime. Sunni Arabs were at a distinct advantage in all areas of secular life. The Government also severely restricted or banned outright many Shi'a religious practices and for decades conducted a brutal campaign of murder, summary execution, arbitrary arrest, and protracted detention against religious leaders and followers of the majority Shi'a Muslim population and sought to undermine the identity of minority Christian (Assyrian and Chaldean) and Yazidi groups. The regime systematically killed senior Shi'a clerics, desecrated Shi'a mosques and holy sites, interfered with Shi'a religious education, and prevented Shi'a adherents from performing their religious rites.

Shi'a Arabs, the religious majority of the population, have long been disadvantaged economically, politically, and socially. Christians have also reported various historical abuses including repression of political rights.

Prior to the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime, the United States had no diplomatic relations with Iraq and thus was unable to raise directly with the Government the problems of severe restrictions on religious freedom and other human rights abuses. However, the U.S. Government made its position clear in public statements and in diplomatic contacts with other states.² In 2003, the U.S. Secretary of State designated Iraq a country of particular concern under the International Religious Freedom Act for the Government's severe violations of religious freedom. The country was similarly designated in 1999, 2000 and 2001.

¹ It is the policy of the Coalition Provisional Authority to help the Iraqi people create a democratic, representative government that respects the fundamental rights of all its citizens, irrespective of ethnicity or faith.

² Since the establishment of the Coalition Provisional Authority in May, the U.S. government has discussed the importance of protecting religious freedom with the Iraqi people and prominent leaders involved in charting the path to a new constitutional system.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

According to best estimates, approximately 97 percent of the population of 22–28 million persons are Muslim. Shi'a Muslims—predominantly Arab, but also including Turkoman, Faily Kurds, and other groups—constitute a 60 to 65 percent majority. Sunni Muslims make up 32 to 37 percent of the population (approximately 18 to 20 percent are Sunni Kurds, 12 to 15 percent Sunni Arabs, and the remainder are Sunni Turkomen). The remaining approximately 3 percent of the overall population consists of Christians (Assyrians, Chaldeans, Roman Catholics, and Armenians), Yazidis, Mandaeans, and a small number of Jews.

Shi'a Arabs, although predominantly located in the south, also comprise a majority in Baghdad and have communities in most parts of the country. Sunnis form the majority in the center of the country and in the north. Shi'a and Sunni Arabs are not ethnically distinct.

Assyrians and Chaldeans are considered by many to be distinct ethnic groups as well as the descendants of some of the earliest Christian communities. These communities speak a distinct language (Syriac). Christians are concentrated in the north and in Baghdad.

The Yazidis are a syncretistic religious group (or a set of several groups). Many Yazidis consider themselves to be ethnically Kurdish, though some would define themselves as both religiously and ethnically distinct from Muslim Kurds. Yazidis predominately reside in the north of the country.

The Mandaeans are a small sect, concentrated mostly in southern Iraq, but with small communities in Baghdad, Kirkuk and elsewhere. The Mandaeans have been present in the country since pre-Christian or early Christian times.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The interim constitution provided for freedom of religion; however, the Government severely restricted this right in practice. Islam was the official state religion and the Constitution did not provide for the recognition of Assyrians, Chaldeans, or Yazidis.³

During the Saddam regime, Government registration requirements for religious organizations were unknown. New political parties had to be based in Baghdad and were prohibited from having any ethnic or religious character. The Government did not recognize political organizations that had been formed by Shi'a Muslims or Assyrian Christians. There were religious qualifications for government office; candidates for the National Assembly, for example, were required to "believe in God."

There were no Shari'a courts as such. Civil courts were empowered to administer Islamic law in cases involving personal status, such as divorce and inheritance. In 2001 in northern Iraq, an Islamic group called the Ansar al-Islam (AI) seized control of several villages near the town of Halabja and established an administration ruled by Shari'a Law; however, the Coalition and Kurdish military forces forced AI and its associate organizations out of the North during Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Shari'a courts ceased to operate in Iraq.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Although Shi'a Arabs are the largest religious group, Sunni Arabs dominated economic and political life under the Hussein regime. Sunni Arabs were at a distinct advantage in all areas of secular life, be it civil, political, military, or economic.

The Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs monitored places of worship, appointed the clergy, approved the building and repair of all places of worship, and approved the publication of all religious literature. This ministry was dissolved after the fall of Saddam Hussein.

The following government restrictions on religious rights remained in effect up until the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime: restrictions on communal Friday prayer by Shi'a; restrictions on Shi'a mosque libraries loaning books; a ban on the broadcast of Shi'a programs on government-controlled radio or television; a ban on the publication of Shi'a books, including prayer books and guides; a ban on many funeral processions other than those organized by the Government; a ban on other Shi'a funeral observances such as gatherings for Koran reading; and the prohibition of certain processions and public meetings commemorating Shi'a holy days.

³At present, the Coalition Provisional Authority is working with the IGC to develop a Fundamental Law that will protect essential liberties until a new permanent constitution is drafted, ratified, and implemented. The agreement reached between CPA and the IGC specifies that the Fundamental Law include a bill of rights with a guarantee of religious freedom.

From 1991 to April 2003, regime security forces were encamped in the shrine to Imam Ali in Najaf, one of Shi'a Islam's holiest sites, and at the city's Shi'a theological schools. The shrine was closed for "repairs" for approximately 2 years after the 1991 uprising. The adjoining al-Khathra mosque, which also was closed in 1994, also remained closed. The closure coincided with the death of Ayatollah Sayed Mohammed Taqi al-Khoei, who was killed in what observers believe was a staged car accident; before his death, Ayatollah al-Khoei led prayers in the al-Khathra mosque.⁴

The Saddam Hussein regime consistently politicized and interfered with religious pilgrimages, both of Iraqi Muslims who wished to make the Hajj to Mecca and Medina and of Iraqi and non-Iraqi Muslim pilgrims who traveled to holy sites within the country.

Shi'a pilgrims from the country and around the world commemorate the death of the Imam Hussein in Karbala twice a year. In past years, the former regime denied visas to many foreign pilgrims for the Ashura, and severely limited or denied observance of the pilgrimage—for several decades the regime interfered with the ritual walking pilgrimage to Karbala to mark the end of the 40-day mourning period. In 2000, the Government issued orders prohibiting the walking pilgrimage to Karbala and reportedly deployed more than 15,000 Republican Guard troops armed with light weapons and in civilian clothes on the main roads leading into both cities to enforce the prohibition. Travelers later reported that security troops opened fire on pilgrims who attempted the walk from Najaf to Karbala as part of the 40th day ritual. Shi'a expatriates reported that groups as small as 10 to 20 pilgrims attempting to make their way into the city at other times were arrested.⁵

Assyrian religious organizations claimed that the Saddam Hussein regime applied apostasy laws in a discriminatory fashion. Assyrians were permitted to convert to Islam, whereas Muslims were forbidden to convert to Christianity.

The Saddam Hussein regime did not permit education in languages other than Arabic and Kurdish. Public instruction in Syriac, which was announced under a 1972 decree, was never implemented. Thus, prior to the fall of the regime in areas under government control, Assyrian and Chaldean children were not permitted to attend classes in Syriac.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

For decades the Saddam Hussein regime conducted a brutal campaign of murder, summary execution, and protracted arbitrary arrest against the religious leaders and followers of the majority Shi'a Muslim population and sought to undermine the identity of minority Christian (Assyrian and Chaldean) and Yazidi groups.

Despite supposed legal protection of religious equality, the regime repressed severely the Shi'a clergy and those who follow the Shi'a faith. Forces from the Intelligence Service (Mukhabarat), General Security (Amn al-Amm), the Military Bureau, Saddam's Commandos (Fedayeen Saddam), and the Ba'ath Party killed senior Shi'a clerics, desecrated Shi'a mosques and holy sites (particularly in the aftermath of the 1991 civil uprising), arrested tens of thousands of Shi'a, interfered with Shi'a religious education, prevented Shi'a adherents from performing their religious rites, and fired upon or arrested Shi'a who sought to take part in their religious processions. Security agents were reportedly stationed at all the major Shi'a mosques and shrines and searched, harassed, and arbitrarily arrested worshipers.

Security forces also forced Shi'a inhabitants of the southern marshes to relocate to major southern cities and to areas along the Iranian border. Former Special Rapporteur van Der Stoel described this practice in his February 1999 report, adding that many other persons were transferred to detention centers and prisons in central Iraq, primarily in Baghdad. The regime also forcibly moved Shi'a populations from the south to the north to replace Kurds, Turkomen, and Assyrians, who had been expelled forcibly from major cities.⁶

With the fall of Saddam Hussein, thousands of religious prisoners were released. While no firm statistics are available regarding the number of religious detainees held by the former regime, observers estimate that the total number of security detainees was in the tens of thousands or more, including numerous religious detainees and prisoners. Some individuals had been held for decades. Others who remain

⁴The Shrine of Imam Ali and the al-Khathra mosque are now open and under the administration of the Shi'a religious community.

⁵Given the fall of Saddam Hussein, however, such restrictions were eliminated. Consequently, this year close to 1.5 million pilgrims participated in the walking pilgrimage.

⁶Since the fall of Saddam, the Iraqi people have been free to move as they please. Numerous religious refugees have returned to their previous homes.

unaccounted for since their arrests may have died or been executed secretly years ago.⁷

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversions, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The country's cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity was not reflected in its political and economic structure. Various segments of the Sunni Arab community, which itself constitutes a minority of the population, effectively controlled the Government since independence in 1932.

Shi'a Arabs, the religious majority of the population, have long been disadvantaged economically, politically, and socially.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Prior to the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime, the United States had no diplomatic relations with Iraq and thus was unable to raise directly with the Government the problems of severe restrictions on religious freedom and other human rights abuses. However, since the establishment of the Coalition Provisional Authority in May, the U.S. government has discussed religious freedom issues with prominent Iraqi leaders in the overall context of the drafting of a new constitution for Iraq.

In 2003, the U.S. Secretary of State designated Iraq a country of particular concern under the International Religious Freedom Act for the Government's severe violations of religious freedom. The country was similarly designated in 1999, 2000 and 2001.

ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

Israel⁸ has no constitution; however, the law provides for freedom of worship, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

Relations among religious groups—between Jews and non-Jews, between Muslims and Christians, and among the different streams of Judaism—often are strained. These tensions have increased significantly since the start of the Intifada in October 2000 and again during the period covered by this report, due primarily to Palestinian terrorist attacks, mostly in the form of suicide bombings and Israel Defense Force (IDF) actions in the occupied territories, all of which resulted in some impediments to religious practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialogue and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Based on its pre-1967 borders, Israel has a total area of approximately 7,685 square miles, and its population is approximately 6.5 million (including Israeli settlers who live in the occupied territories). According to government figures, approximately 80 percent of the population are Jewish, although an unknown number of these citizens do not qualify as Jews according to the Orthodox Jewish definition or that utilized by the Government in civil procedures. Additionally, non-Jews (usually Christians) who immigrate to the country with their Jewish relatives often are counted as Jews for statistical purposes. According to government figures, among the Jewish population, approximately 4.5 percent are Haredi, or ultra-Orthodox, and another 13 percent are Orthodox. The vast majority of the Jewish population describe themselves as "traditional," or as "secular" Jews, most of whom observe some Jewish traditions. A growing but still small number of traditional and secular Jews

⁷The Coalition Provisional Authority is currently working with Iraqis and the international community to account for missing prisoners and to document atrocities against religious communities committed by the Saddam Hussein regime.

⁸The religious freedom situation in the occupied territories is discussed in the annex appended to this report.

associate themselves with the Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist streams of Judaism, which are not officially recognized in the country. A 2001 poll found that the majority of Jews accepted the tenets of Reform and Conservative Judaism, and that the vast majority believed Reform and Conservative weddings conducted in the country should be recognized by the State. Though the Government does not officially recognize them, these streams of Judaism do receive a small amount of government funding and are recognized by the country's courts.

Approximately 20 percent of the population is non-Jewish. Of this 20 percent, approximately 80 percent are Muslim, 10 percent Christian, and 10 percent Druze. The country's non-Jewish population is concentrated in the north of the country, in Bedouin communities in the Negev region in the south, and in a narrow band of Arab villages in central Israel adjacent to the occupied territories. There also are small numbers of evangelical Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses. The country's 250,000 guest workers are predominantly Roman Catholic and Buddhist.

The Basic Law describes the country as a "Jewish" and "democratic" state. Most of the non-Jewish minority are Muslims, Druze, and Christians. Of this group, most are Arabs, and are subject to various forms of discrimination, some of which have religious dimensions. Israeli Arabs, temporary residents, and other non-Jewish Israelis are generally free to practice their religions.

Numerous missionary groups operate in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Israel has no constitution; however, the law provides for freedom of worship, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Declaration of Independence describes the country as a "Jewish state," but also provides for full social and political equality regardless of religious affiliation. Israeli Arabs and other non-Jews are generally free to practice their religions. The discrepancies that exist in the treatment of various communities in society are based on several variables, including the distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish citizens. Due to the "status quo" agreement reached at the founding of the state reflecting the influence of Orthodox Jewish political parties, the Government implements certain policies based on interpretations of religious law. For example, the national airline, El Al, and public buses in most cities do not operate on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, although some private bus companies do operate on the Sabbath. According to the law, Jews in most professions may not work on the Sabbath. This law generally is enforced in the retail sector; however, it is enforced inconsistently in the entertainment sector. Additionally, streets in some Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods are closed to vehicles on the Sabbath.

Israeli law recognizes the "religious communities" as carried over from those recognized under the British Mandate. These are: Eastern Orthodox, Latin (Catholic), Gregorian-Armenian, Armenian-Catholic, Syrian (Catholic), Chaldean (Uniate), Greek Catholic Melkite, Maronite, Syrian Orthodox, and Jewish. Three additional religious communities have subsequently been recognized—the Druze, the Evangelical Episcopal Church, and the Baha'i. The status of some Christian denominations with representation in the country has been defined by a collection of ad hoc arrangements with various government agencies. The fact that the Muslim population was not defined as a religious community is a vestige of the Ottoman period during which Islam was the dominant religion and does not affect the rights of the Muslim community to practice their faith. At the end of the period covered by this report, several of these denominations were pending official government recognition; however, the Government has allowed adherents of not officially recognized groups freedom to practice.

Unrecognized religions have no religious tribunals with jurisdiction over their members in matters of personal status; however, 1961 legislation gave Muslim Shari'a courts exclusive jurisdiction in matters of personal status. Non-recognized denominations do not receive government funding for their religious services, as do many of the recognized communities; however, the Arrangements Law provides exemption from municipal taxes for any synagogue, church, mosque, or place of worship.

The 1971 Religious Jewish services law authorizes the Ministry of Religious Affairs to establish religious councils in Jewish towns, cities, and settlements. The State finances 40 percent of the council's budget and local authorities fund the remainder. However, an Arab advocacy group charged that, for the most part, the State did not allocate funds for the provision of religious services in Arab towns and villages, except for a Druze religious council that was recently recognized by law.

During the period covered by this report, the Israeli Government continued to refuse recognition to the duly elected Greek Orthodox Patriarch, Eirinaios I. Eirinaios I was elected in August 2001, and because of the lack of recognition by the Israeli Government has been unable to conclude financial or legal arrangements on behalf of the Patriarchate for the past 2 years. In 2002 the Israeli police confiscated the passport of Archimandrite Attallah Hanna, an Israeli citizen and a priest with the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. His passport had not been returned by the end of the period covered by this report.

A reportedly small number of IDF soldiers killed in action since September 2000 were Muslim, Druze, and Israeli Arab Christians. After the family of one of the soldiers could not find a Muslim cleric to perform his burial, public debate ensued over the fact that the IDF does not employ a Muslim chaplain. In late 2000, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ordered the IDF to hire a Muslim chaplain; however, by the end of the period covered by this report the IDF was unable to find a Muslim cleric who was willing to serve as an IDF chaplain. However, Muslim soldiers are allowed to take home leave for all Muslim holidays.

The Government funds both religious and secular schools in the country, including non-Jewish religious and secular schools. Some secular Jewish schools have adopted a religious education program developed by the non-Orthodox streams. Schools in Arab areas, including Arab parochial schools, receive significantly fewer resources than comparable Jewish schools.

The Government recognizes the following Jewish holidays as national holidays: Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, and Passover. Arab municipalities often recognize Christian and Muslim holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Orthodox Jewish religious authorities have exclusive control over Jewish marriages, divorces, and most burials. Many Jewish citizens object to such exclusive control, and it has at times been a source of serious controversy in society.

Under the Law of Return, the Government grants automatic citizenship and residency rights to Jewish immigrants and their families. Based on a decision made in 2000 by the Attorney General, residency rights are not granted to relatives of converts to Judaism, except to children of female converts who are born after the mother's conversion is complete. The Law of Return does not apply to non-Jews or to persons of Jewish descent who have converted to another faith. Approximately 36 percent of the country's Jewish population was born outside of the country. Until 2002 the Government designated "nationality" (i.e., Arab, Russian, or "Jew," etc.) on national identity documents. Groups representing persons who consider themselves Jewish but who do not meet the Interior Ministry's criteria have long sought either a change in the rules, or to have the nationality designation completely removed from identity cards, a move also supported by many Arab groups. During the period covered by this report, the Government began issuing new identification cards that do not carry a nationality designation to those seeking new or replacement national identity documents.

The 1967 Protection of Holy Sites Law protects holy sites of all religions and the penal code makes it a criminal offense to damage any holy site. During the year, there were no reports of damage to holy sites in which perpetrators were held accountable.

The Government permits religious organizations to apply for funding to maintain or build holy sites and funding has been provided for the upkeep of holy sites such as mosques and cemeteries. Orthodox Jewish holy sites receive significantly greater proportions of funding than do non-Orthodox Jewish and non-Jewish holy sites. Muslim groups complain that the Government has not equitably funded the construction and upkeep of mosques in comparison to the funding of synagogues and has been reluctant to refurbish mosques in areas where there is no longer a Muslim population.

Building codes for places of worship are selectively enforced based on religion. Some Bedouin, living in unrecognized villages, were denied building permits for construction of mosques. For example, in October 2002, local Bedouin began construction without a permit of a mosque in the village of Tal el-Malah in southern Israel. Without this construction, residents, numbering about 1,500, had to travel over 12 kilometers to the nearest mosque. Difficulties in reaching more distant mosques prevented some residents from engaging in public prayer, as required by their religious beliefs. In February, the Government inspector served notice to the village that the building was illegally constructed and would be demolished. The Government carried out that order in May, despite, according to one human rights NGO, the upcoming Muslim holiday of 'Eid al-Adha and entreaties from the community. In contrast,

in violation of zoning restrictions, there are approximately 100 illegal synagogues in Tel Aviv, some within apartment buildings and others in separate structures.

A 1977 anti-proselytizing law prohibits any person from offering or receiving material benefits as an inducement to conversion; however, there have been no reports of the law's enforcement during the period covered by this report.

Missionaries are allowed to proselytize, although the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) voluntarily refrains from proselytizing under an agreement with the Government. During the period covered by this report, some missionaries complained of difficulties renewing their visas, although their complaints eventually were resolved.

The Government generally continued to permit Muslim citizens to make the Hajj during the period covered by this report. Because Israel and Saudi Arabia do not have diplomatic relations, Israeli-Arab Muslims are required to transit Jordan and obtain Jordanian travel documents to enter Saudi Arabia. In Jordan, they temporarily relinquish their Israeli passports for the Jordanian documents. Their passports are returned to them upon re-entry into the country. Israeli law prohibits Muslims under the age of 35 from making the Hajj and requires government permission for the trip. The Government claims that this is in order to meet quota restrictions imposed by the Saudi Government on the number of persons permitted to enter Saudi Arabia annually for the Hajj. In addition, the Government limits each person to no more than one visit, with the exception of those making the Hajj on behalf of someone handicapped or who died before being able to make the pilgrimage himself. The Government may also prohibit the travel of persons from Israel to Saudi Arabia because of security considerations. The result of this restriction is that some Muslims are unable to fulfill their religious obligations to make the Hajj.

During the period covered by this report, many groups and individuals of numerous religions traveled to the country freely. However, the Government at times denied entry to foreign groups or activists, whom it deemed sympathetic to Palestinians or likely to pose a threat to security.

The Government denied entry and residence to at least 80 Catholic clergy and seminarians assigned by the Vatican to fulfill religious obligations in Israel and the occupied territories.

The Government states that it is committed to granting equal and fair conditions to non-Jewish citizens—who constitute approximately 20 percent of the population and who are predominately Israeli Arabs—particularly in the areas of education, housing, and employment. However, the Government does not provide non-Jews with the same quality of education, housing, employment, and social services as Jews. On a per capita basis, the Government spends two-thirds as much for non-Jews as for Jews. Although such policies are based on a variety of factors, they reflect de facto discrimination against the country's non-Jewish citizens. Many ministers publicly acknowledge the continuing disparities in government funding for the country's non-Jewish citizens.

In civic areas in which religion is a determining criterion, such as the religious courts and centers of education, non-Orthodox Jewish institutions routinely receive less state support than their Orthodox Jewish counterparts. Additionally, National Religious (i.e., modern Orthodox, one of the country's official Jewish school systems) and Christian parochial schools complain that they receive less funding than secular schools despite the fact that they voluntarily abide by all national curricular standards. During the period covered by this report, the two groups together took their case for equal funding to the High Court.

Government resources available to non-Orthodox Jewish and Arab public schools are proportionately less than those available to Orthodox Jewish public schools. Quality private religious schools for Israeli Arabs exist; however, parents often must pay tuition for their children to attend such schools due to inadequate government funding. Jewish private religious schools receive significant government funding in addition to philanthropic contributions from within the country and abroad, which effectively lower tuition costs for Jewish parents. Non-Jews are underrepresented in the student bodies and faculties of most universities and in the higher level professional and business ranks.

Government funding to the different religious sectors is disproportionate. Non-Orthodox streams of Judaism and the non-Jewish sector receive proportionally less funding than the Orthodox Jewish sector. Only 2 percent of the Ministry of Religious Affairs budget goes to the non-Jewish sector. The High Court of Justice heard a case in 1997 alleging that the budgetary allocation to the non-Jewish sector constituted discrimination. In 1998 the Court ruled that the budget allocation constituted "prima facie discrimination," but that the plaintiff's petition did not provide adequate information about the religious needs of the various communities. In May

2000, the same plaintiffs presented a case on the specific needs of religious communities regarding burials. The court agreed that non-Jewish cemeteries were receiving inadequate resources and ordered the Government to increase funding to such cemeteries; the Government began to implement this decision in 2001, although some groups complained that implementation was too slow.

In March, the Government announced that it would dismantle the Ministry of Religion within 12 months and turn its responsibilities over to the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Interior. At the end of the period covered by this report, a deputy minister, rather than a minister, headed the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

The Jewish National Fund (JNF) owns approximately 8 percent of the country's land area and manages another 8 percent on behalf of the Government. The JNF's by-laws prohibit it from selling or leasing land to non-Jews, which have prevented Israeli Arabs from buying homes in JNF-developed areas.

Issues of marriage and divorce are under the exclusive jurisdiction of recognized religious courts. Secular courts have primacy over questions of inheritance, but parties, by mutual agreement, may bring inheritance cases to religious courts. Jewish and Druze families may ask that some family status matters, such as alimony and child custody, be adjudicated in civil courts as an alternative to religious courts. Christians only may ask that child custody and child support be adjudicated in civil courts as an alternative to religious courts. Since November 2001, Muslims also have the right to bring matters such as alimony and property division associated with divorce cases to civil courts in family-status cases. However, paternity cases are under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Muslim or Shari'a court.

The State does not recognize marriages or conversions to Judaism performed in the country by non-Orthodox rabbis. In 2001 the Chief Rabbinate issued regulations stipulating that immigrants who arrived in the country after 1990 must be investigated to confirm that they are Jewish before they can be married in a Jewish ceremony; however, during the period covered by this report, the Government rescinded the requirement. Israeli Jews who wish to marry in secular or non-Orthodox religious ceremonies and to have those marriages recognized, must do so abroad, and the Ministry of Interior recognizes such marriages. Others hold weddings unrecognized by the Government, including Kibbutz, Reform, and Conservative weddings.

Many Jewish citizens object to the exclusive control of the Orthodox establishment, and it has been at times a source of serious controversy in society, particularly in recent years, because thousands of immigrants from the former Soviet Union have not been recognized as Jewish by Orthodox authorities. This affects whether an individual is entitled to be buried in a Jewish cemetery, whether they are entitled to a religious Jewish marriage ceremony recognized by the state, and to divorce matters. The 1996 Alternative Burial Law established the individual right to be buried in an alternative civil cemetery and that these cemeteries were to be located throughout the country. Several non-Orthodox Jewish and secular groups have complained that the Ministry of Religious Affairs has been slow to implement this law and that there have been an inadequate number of civil cemeteries designated. According to one organization advocating the timely implementation of the 1996 law, many persons who would prefer a civil interment are forced to finance civil burials privately through a kibbutz, which is costly. Despite the demand, the Government has not allocated adequate space or sufficient funds for the development of alternative burial sites. For example, following the 2001 Dolphinarium discotheque bombing, the Rabbinate declared some former Soviet Union Jewish victims ineligible for Jewish burial. The Government did not provide adequate alternative Jewish burial sites.

In the January general election, the Shinui Party, which ran on a platform of ending much of the Orthodox establishment's exclusive power, won 15 seats in the Knesset, making it the third largest party in the Parliament. Shinui joined the Government and was given control over the Ministries of Interior and Justice. Shinui has stated that it plans significant reforms to personal status and other questions handled by the ministries in its purview. The new Government also effectively lowered the status of the Religious Affairs Ministry by leaving it in the hands of a deputy minister rather than naming a new minister.

Under the Jewish religious courts' interpretation of personal status law, a Jewish woman may not receive a final writ of divorce without her husband's consent. Consequently, there are thousands of so-called "agunot," or women who are unable to remarry or have legitimate children because their husbands either have disappeared or refused to grant a divorce.

Rabbinical tribunals have the authority to impose sanctions on husbands who refuse to divorce their wives or on wives who refuse to accept a divorce from their husbands. At least one man, a U.S. citizen, has been in jail for 4 years because he refuses to grant his wife a writ of divorce. At the end of the period covered by this

report, he remained in prison. However, in some cases rabbinical courts have failed to invoke sanctions. In cases in which a wife refuses to accept a divorce, the rabbinical courts occasionally allow a husband to take a second wife; however, a wife never may take a second husband. Rabbinical courts also may exercise jurisdiction over and issue sanctions against non-Israeli persons present in the country.

Some Islamic law courts have held that Muslim women may not request a divorce, but that women may be forced to consent if a divorce is granted to the husband.

Members of unrecognized religious groups (particularly evangelical Christians) sometimes face problems obtaining marriage certificates or burial services. However, informal arrangements with other recognized religious groups provide relief in some cases.

In April the Women of the Wall, a group of more than 100 Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform women, lost their 14-year legal battle to hold formal women's prayer services at the Western Wall. The High Court ruled that the group could not hold prayer services at the Western Wall, and instead would be permitted to hold them at nearby Robinson's Arch. Most Orthodox Jews believe that mixed gender prayer services violate the precepts of Judaism, and Jews generally still are unable to hold mixed gender prayer services at the Western Wall. The Conservative movement is experimenting with conducting services at a different, recently excavated portion of the wall. The North American Reform Movement has rejected such an alternative.

There are numerous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) maintaining dialogue between different religions. Interfaith dialogue often is linked to the peace process between the country and its Arab neighbors. In May, Reverend Emile Shoufani, an Israeli priest and educator, led a joint Jewish-Arab delegation to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp as part of an effort to develop interfaith dialogue. Rabbi Michael Melchior, Member of the Knesset, promotes interfaith activities to advance the peace process and discourage terrorism and violence. He also contributes to the Alexandria Interfaith Peace Process, initiated at the January 2002 interfaith summit in Alexandria, Egypt.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations among different religious groups—between Jews and non-Jews, between Christians and Muslims, and among the different streams of Judaism—often are strained. Many Jewish citizens object to the exclusive control the Orthodox Jewish authorities have over Jewish marriages, divorces, and most burials. This has been, at times, a source of serious controversy in society. Tensions between Jews and non-Jews are the result of historical grievances, cultural and religious differences, and are compounded by governmental and societal discrimination against Israeli-Arabs. They have been heightened by the Arab-Israeli conflict, and increased significantly during the period covered by this report, due primarily to Palestinian terrorist attacks, mostly in the form of suicide bombings, and IDF actions in the occupied territories, all of which resulted in some impediments to religious practice. For example, in 2002 a suicide bomber attacked a Passover holiday Seder, killing 20 persons and injuring over 100.

Animosity between secular and religious Jews continued during the period covered by this report. Non-Orthodox Jews have complained of discrimination and intolerance on the part of members of ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups. Persons who consider themselves Jewish but who are not considered Jewish under Orthodox law particularly complained of discrimination. Instances of ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups or individuals verbally or physically harassing women for "immodest dress" or other violations of their interpretation of religious law occur in ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods. At the end of the reporting period there were incidents in Jerusalem where ultra-Orthodox Jews threw rocks and garbage at passing motorists to protest that they were driving on the Sabbath.

Observant Jews also faced some discrimination. In 2001 the Beersheva labor court ruled that employers could not discriminate against employees or job applicants who refuse to work on the Sabbath. The judge ruled that "an employer is obligated to behave equally towards job seekers, including setting conditions of acceptance that do not take into account the potential employees' beliefs or religion, unless the job functions require distinctions, such as work on the Sabbath."

Societal attitudes toward missionary activities and conversion generally are negative. Many Jews are opposed to missionary activity directed at Jews and some are hostile toward Jewish converts to Christianity. Christian and Muslim Israeli Arab religious leaders complain that missionary activity that leads to conversions frequently disrupts family coherence in their community.

In recent years, evangelical Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Reform and Conservative Jews complained of incidents of harassment, threats, and vandalism directed against their buildings and other facilities, many of which were committed by two ultra-Orthodox groups, Yad L'Achim and Lev L'Achim.

During the period covered by this report, mainstream newspapers periodically criticized the country's ultra-Orthodox or "Haredim" community for its majority's exemption from military service and receipt of government assistance in lieu of working.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy consistently raised issues of religious freedom with the Foreign Ministry, the police, the Prime Minister's office, and the Ministry of the Interior.

In meetings with government officials, the U.S. Embassy and State Department officials in Washington have objected to the arbitrary and discriminatory practice of denying some U.S. citizens entry into the country based on religious and ethnic background.

Embassy representatives, including the Ambassador, routinely meet with religious officials. These contacts include meetings with Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Baha'i leaders at a variety of levels.

Embassy officials maintain a dialogue with NGOs that follow human and civil rights issues, including religious freedom. These NGOs include the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, the Israel Religious Action Center, Adalah, and others.

Embassy representatives attended meetings of groups seeking to promote interfaith dialogue, including the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel, the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee, the Abraham Fund Initiatives, which promotes coexistence between Jewish and Arab citizens, and have met with Israeli-Arab leaders to discuss religious freedom issues, including Adalah and the Islamic Movement-Northern Branch. The Embassy provided small grants to local organizations promoting interfaith dialogue and to organizations examining the role of religion in resolving conflict.

The Occupied Territories (Including Areas Subject to the Jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority)

Israel occupied the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, and East Jerusalem during the 1967 War. Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) now administer the West Bank and Gaza Strip to varying extents. The PA does not have a constitution; however, the Basic Law passed in 2002 provides for freedom of religion, and the PA generally respects this right in practice. The Basic Law names Islam as the official religion, but also calls for "respect and sanctity" for other religions.

Israel exercises varying degrees of legal control in the West Bank. Israel has no constitution; however, Israeli law provides for freedom of worship, and the Israeli Government generally respects this right in practice. The Israeli Government's strict closure policies, enacted due to security concerns or at the behest of settlers demanding exclusive use of roads located near Palestinian towns, restricted the ability of Palestinians to reach places of worship and practice their religions.

There was no change in the status of the PA's respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

There generally are amicable relations between Christians and Muslims. Societal attitudes are a barrier to conversions from Islam. Relations between Jews and non-Jews, as well as among the different branches of Judaism, are sometimes strained. Societal tensions between Jews and non-Jews exist primarily as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict; such tensions remained high during the period covered by this report. The violence that has occurred since the outbreak of the Intifada in October 2000 has significantly curtailed religious practice in the occupied territories, including damaging severely places of worship and religious shrines.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the PA in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The occupied territories are composed of the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. The Gaza Strip covers an area of 143 square miles, and its population is 1,274,868 persons. The West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) covers an area of 2,238 square miles, and its population is 2,237,194 persons. East Jerusalem covers an area of 27 square miles and its population is approximately 390,000 persons.

The vast majority (98.4 percent) of the Palestinian residents of the occupied territories are Sunni Muslims. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, there are 39,560 Palestinian Christians living in the territories. However, according to the sum of estimates provided by individual Christian denominations, the total number of Christians is approximately 200,000. A majority of Christians are Greek Orthodox (approximately 120,000), and there also are a significant number of Roman Catholics and Greek Catholics (approximately 50,000 total), Protestants, Syriacs, Armenians, Copts, Maronites, and Ethiopian Orthodox. In general Christians are concentrated in the areas of Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Bethlehem. In 2002 approximately 500 Christians from Bethlehem left the occupied territories for other countries. According to Christian leaders, most of the Christians left their homes for economic and security reasons and not due to religious discrimination. Jewish Israeli settlers reside in the West Bank (approximately 180,000), Gaza (approximately 6,500), and Jerusalem (approximately 200,000). There is a community of approximately 550 Samaritans (an ancient offshoot of Judaism) located on Mount Gerazim near Nablus in the West Bank.

Several evangelical Christian as well as Jehovah's Witnesses' missionary groups operate in the West Bank.

Foreign missionaries operate in the occupied territories including a small number of evangelical Christian pastors who seek to convert Muslims to Christianity. While they maintain a generally low profile, the PA is aware of their activities and generally does not restrict them.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Palestinian Authority has no constitution; however, the 2002 Basic Law provides for religious freedom and the PA generally respects this right in practice. The PA has not adopted legislation regarding religious freedom; however, both the Basic Law and the draft Constitution address religion. The Basic Law states that "Islam is the official religion in Palestine," and that "respect and sanctity of all other heavenly religions (i.e., Judaism and Christianity) shall be maintained." In 2002, the Basic Law was approved by the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) and signed by PA President Yasir Arafat. The March 2003 version of a draft constitution states that "Islam is the official religion of the State, and "Christianity and all other monotheistic religions shall be equally revered and respected." It is unclear whether the injunction to "respect" other religions would translate into an effective legal protection of religious freedom. The Basic Law states that the principles of Shari'a (Islamic law) are "the main source of legislation," while the draft constitution states that Shari'a is "a major source of legislation."

Churches in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza may be subdivided into three general categories: Churches recognized by the status quo agreements reached under Ottoman rule in the late 19th century; Protestant and evangelical churches that were established between the late 19th century and 1967, which, although they exist and practice their faith, are not recognized officially by the PA; and a small number of churches that became active within the last decade, whose legal status is more tenuous.

The first group of churches is governed by the 19th century status quo agreements, which the PA respects and which specifically established the presence and rights of the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Assyrian, Syrian Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Coptic, and Ethiopian Orthodox Churches. The Episcopal and Lutheran Churches were added later to the list. The PA accepted these churches and their rights immediately. Like Shari'a courts under Islam, these religious groups are permitted to have ecclesiastical courts whose rulings are considered legally binding on personal status issues and some land issues. Civil courts do not adjudicate on such matters.

According to the PA, no other churches have applied for official recognition. However, the second group of churches, which includes the Assembly of God, Nazarene Church, and some Baptist churches, has unwritten understandings with the PA based on the principles of the status quo agreements. They are permitted to operate

freely and are able to perform certain personal status legal functions, such as issuing marriage certificates.

The third group of churches consists of a small number of proselytizing churches, including Jehovah's Witnesses and some evangelical Christian groups. These groups have encountered opposition in their efforts to obtain recognition, both from Muslims, who oppose their proselytizing, and Christians, who fear that the new arrivals may disrupt the status quo. These churches generally operate unhindered. At least one of these churches deferred plans to request official recognition from the PA after the outbreak of the Intifada in October 2000.

In practice, the PA requires Palestinians to be affiliated with a religion. Religion must be declared on identification papers, and all personal status legal matters must be handled in either Shari'a or Christian ecclesiastical courts.

Since Islam is the official religion of the Palestinian Authority, Islamic institutions and places of worship receive preferential treatment. The PA has a Ministry of Waqf and Religious Affairs, which pays for the construction and maintenance of mosques and the salaries of many Palestinian imams. The Ministry also provides some Christian clergymen and Christian charitable organizations with limited financial support. The PA does not provide financial support to any Jewish institutions or holy sites in the Occupied Territories; however, it paid for the refurbishment of Joseph's Tomb—a shrine in Nablus holy to both Jews and Muslims—after Palestinian demonstrators damaged it in 2000. In 2002 Palestinian militants again damaged Joseph's Tomb, and the PA has yet to repair the shrine.

The PA requires that religion be taught in PA schools. There are separate courses for Muslim and Christian students and there is a compulsory curriculum that requires the study of Christianity for Christian students in grades one through 6.

The PA does not officially sponsor interfaith dialog; however, it attempts to foster goodwill among religious leaders. The PA makes a strong effort to maintain good relations with the Christian community, and there is no pattern of PA harassment of Christians. Within the Ministry of Religious Affairs, there is a portfolio responsible for Christian affairs, and PA Chairman Yasir Arafat has an advisor on Christian affairs. Six Christians and 1 Samaritan sit on the 88-member PLC in seats set aside for representatives of these religions.

The Palestinian Authority observes several religious holidays, including, 'Eid al-Fitr, 'Eid al-Adha, Zikra al-Hijra al-Nabawiya, and the Prophet Muhammed's birthday. Christians also may observe the holidays of Christmas and Easter.

Israel has no constitution; however, the law provides for freedom of worship, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

The Israeli Government gives preferential treatment to Jewish residents of the occupied territories and East Jerusalem in the areas of permits for home building and civic services. For example, Arab residents of Jerusalem pay the same taxes as Jewish residents; however, Arab residents receive significantly fewer municipal services than Jewish residents. Many of the national and municipal policies enacted in Jerusalem are designed to limit or diminish the non-Jewish population of Jerusalem. According to Palestinian and Israeli human rights organizations, the Israeli Government uses a combination of zoning restrictions on building for Palestinians, confiscation of Palestinian lands, and demolition of Palestinian homes to "contain" non-Jewish neighborhoods.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Since the start of the Intifada, officials in the Jerusalem Waqf prohibited non-Muslims from entering the sanctuary of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, the third holiest shrine in Islam and the holiest site in Judaism. Waqf officials claimed that this was a temporary closure implemented because they could not justify allowing non-Muslims to visit the Haram al-Sharif at a time when Palestinian Muslims from the occupied territories were prevented from visiting and worshiping there.

However, in June 2003, armed Israeli police officers began escorting groups of Christian and Jewish tourists into the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount against the wishes of the Waqf authorities. Israeli police spokesmen indicated that the visits were an effort by the Government of Israel to re-assert the right of non-Muslims to visit the shrine. Although the situation remained fluid, these visits continued until the end of the reporting period.

A 1995 Israeli High Court of Justice ruling guides Israeli policy regarding Jewish prayer at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. The ruling theoretically allowed small numbers of Jews under police escort to pray at the site. Israeli police consistently have declined to enforce this ruling on public safety grounds, and publicly have indicated that this policy has not changed in light of the renewed visits of non-Muslims to the compound.

In 2002 Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian officials arranged to repair a bulge that appeared in the southern wall of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. After disagreements between Israeli and Waqf officials over the cause of the bulge halted repair work for several months, Jordanian engineers visited the site in November 2002 to examine the damage and, at the end of the period covered by this report, were working to repair it.

Personal status law for Palestinians is based on religious law. For Muslim Palestinians, personal status law is derived from Shari'a, and the varied ecclesiastical courts rule on personal status issues for Christians. In the West Bank and Gaza, Shari'a pertaining to women is part of the Jordanian Status Law of 1976, which includes inheritances and marriage laws. Under the law, women inherit less than male members of the family do. The marriage law allows men to take more than one wife, although few do so. Prior to marriage, a woman and man may stipulate to terms in the marriage contract, which, in the event of divorce, would govern financial and custodial matters. However, only an estimated 1 percent of women utilize this section of the law, leaving the vast majority of women at a disadvantage when it comes to divorce or child custody.

Due to the continued Intifada, violence remained a significant problem during the period covered by this report. The violent confrontations that had erupted in September 2000 continued on an almost daily basis and resulted in the deaths and injuries of thousands of persons.

Due to the increased violence and security concerns, the Israeli Government imposed strict closures and curfews on the occupied territories in October 2000 that still were in place at the end of the period covered by this report. Such restrictions significantly impeded freedom of access to places of worship for Muslims and Christians during the period covered by this report.

Based on security concerns, the Government of Israel in 2002 began construction of a security barrier in the occupied territories. The practical effect of the construction has led to the confiscation of non-Jewish property and the displacement of Christian and Muslim residents, and worsening of restrictions on freedom of access to places of worship for non-Jewish communities.

In February, the Government of Israel issued confiscation orders for land in Bethlehem that surrounds Rachel's Tomb (a shrine holy to Jews, Christians, and Muslims) that would place the shrine on the Israeli part of the security barrier. Jewish tourists visiting the shrine have occasionally been harassed by Palestinians, but some Muslims and Christians claimed that confiscating land around the shrine in response impedes their access to the site and unjustly harms the landowners in question. The Government of Israel has yet to build the separation barrier in this area.

The Government of Israel also confiscated land from the Baron Deir monastery in Bethlehem, belonging to the Armenian Patriarchate, for construction of an Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) patrol road in the area. Although negotiations between the Patriarchate and the Government of Israel reduced the amount of land confiscated, the parties had not reached agreement on compensation for damage done to the property by the IDF during incursions into Bethlehem in April 2002.

In practice, Israeli closure policies, imposed due to security concerns, prevented tens of thousands of Palestinians from reaching places of worship in Jerusalem and the West Bank, including during religious holidays, such as Ramadan, Christmas, and Easter. On a number of occasions, the Israeli Government also prevented worshippers under the age of 45 from attending Friday prayers inside the Haram al-Sharif. The Israeli Government stated that it did so in an effort to prevent outbreaks of violence following Friday prayers (see Section III). In April 2002, there were minor clashes in Jerusalem near the Old City's Lion Gate after Israeli police barred male worshippers under the age of 40 from attending afternoon prayers. Those who were refused entry marched in protest and threw stones at the police; however, no injuries were reported.

During the period covered by this report, the Israeli Government's continued closure policy prevented a number of Palestinian religious leaders (both Muslim and Christian) from reaching their congregations. The Israeli Government pledged to create a "hotline" to facilitate the movement of clerics through checkpoints in 2001; however, it had not done so by the end of the period covered by this report. In previous years, several clergymen reported that they were subject to harassment at checkpoints.

During the period covered by this report, the Israeli Government continued to refuse recognition to the duly elected Greek Orthodox Patriarch, Eirinaios I. Eirinaios I was elected in August 2001, and because of the lack of recognition by the Israeli Government has been unable to conclude financial or legal arrangements on behalf of the Patriarchate for the past 2 years. In 2002 the Israeli police con-

fiscated the passport of Archimandrite Attallah Hanna, an Israeli citizen and a priest with the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. His passport had not been returned by the end of the period covered by this report.

Palestinian violence against Israeli settlers prevented some settlers from reaching Jewish holy sites in the occupied territories during the period covered by this report. Some Israelis were unable to reach Jewish sites in the occupied territories such as Rachel's Tomb and the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron due to the ongoing violence, including on religious holidays.

Settler violence against Palestinians prevented some Palestinians from reaching holy sites in the occupied territories. According to press reports, for 3 weeks in October 2002 settlers in Hebron forcibly prevented Muslim muezzins from reaching the al-Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs to sound the call to prayer.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Since the establishment of the PA, there have been periodic but not independently verified allegations that a small number of Muslim converts to Christianity at times are subjected to societal discrimination and harassment by PA officials, including detention and questioning by security forces. During the period covered by this report, there were no such allegations.

During the past few years, Israeli forces deliberately mistreated or accidentally injured several Christian religious leaders and lay members. On April 4, 2002, patriarchs of several major Christian denominations in Jerusalem claimed that the IDF forcibly entered numerous churches in Bethlehem and Ramallah and mistreated clergymen. For example, the Syrian Orthodox Archbishop claimed that an IDF unit entered a Syrian Orthodox Church in Bethlehem, damaged property, and threatened a 70-year-old priest with a gun. On April 7, 2002, an Israeli army unit operating in Ramallah forced its way into the Lutheran Church of Hope and used the pastor as a human shield, forcing him to walk ahead of the unit into potentially hostile areas as it searched the premises. On April 8, another Israeli army unit similarly used a Christian religious leader, Reverend Ramez Ansara of the Lutheran Evangelical Church. On April 10, an IDF sniper shot and injured an Armenian lay monk during a standoff at the Church of the Nativity.

According to some Palestinian individuals and human rights organizations, Israeli soldiers at times arbitrarily enforced closure in such a way as to interfere with Muslim religious practices. In particular there were allegations that Israeli soldiers closed the al-Ram checkpoint at sundown late in 2001 during Ramadan, preventing thousands of Muslims from returning home to break their fasts.

On June 13, the day that Muslims celebrated the Prophet Mohammed's birthday, IDF personnel closed the al-Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron in violation of the Hebron Protocol, which states that the mosque should be available to Muslim worshipers on Muslim holidays. On June 24, Israeli officers issued a new order preventing the muezzin at the al-Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron from sounding the call to prayer when Jews are praying in their portion of the shrine.

Although it is difficult to assess culpability in the destruction of and damage to many places of worship in the occupied territories, their destruction or damage affects the practice of religion and religious freedom. Among the sites damaged were St. Mary's Convent, the chapel at Bethlehem University, the Lutheran Church and orphanage in Beit Jala, the Latin Convent in Beit Sahour, the Bethlehem Bible College, a Syrian Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Pilgrim's House, and the Omar Ibn al-Khattab Mosque. Both, the ninth century al-Khader Mosque in Nablus, reputed to be the oldest mosque in the occupied territories, and the church of Mar Mitri, the oldest Christian church in Nablus, were destroyed.

During the past 2 years, there were credible reports that Israeli soldiers acted on their own and caused significant damage to Palestinian church property. On January 24, the IDF fired a missile that penetrated the roof of St. Philip's Episcopal Church in the Gaza Strip and exploded inside. The explosion created a 1.5 meter crater near the altar and shattered all the stained glass windows and chandeliers. Church officials report that they filed a claim with the IDF for \$30,000 of damage, but have not yet received a response. At the end of the reporting period, the Church was not repaired and remains unusable.

In 2002, gun and tank fire damaged the Holy Family Hospital, the Lutheran Christmas Church, and the Dar al-Kalima Academy in Bethlehem. Such damage often was extensive and included destruction of church and school property, including religious symbols. Damage in a number of these cases exceeded \$85,000, and the institutions have filed claims for restitution with the Israeli Government. The Israeli Government did not refurbish any of the places of worship that the IDF damaged while operating in the occupied territories, and denied requests for compensa-

tion submitted in that regard. The Government stated that it was not responsible for damages incurred during a state of war.

Armed action by Palestinian gunmen and members of the Palestinian security services against Israeli forces damaged some religious buildings. During a 2002 armed standoff between Israeli forces and a group of approximately 160 Palestinian gunmen, including PA security forces, the Church of the Nativity, the Latin (Roman Catholic) section of the Nativity compound, and the Greek Orthodox and Armenian monasteries sustained considerable material damage.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the occupied territories.

Forced Religious Conversions

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Generally there are amicable relations between Christians and Muslims; however, tensions do exist and occasionally surface. Relations between Jews and non-Jews, as well as among the different branches of Judaism, often are strained. Tensions between Jews and non-Jews exist primarily as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict, as well as Israel's control of access to sites holy to Christians and Muslims. Some non-Orthodox Jews have complained of discrimination and intolerance on the part of some Orthodox Jews.

Societal attitudes are a barrier to conversions, especially for Muslims converting to Christianity. One senior Christian cleric reportedly quietly dissuaded a number of such prospective converts from being baptized in Jerusalem for fear that they would be ostracized by their families or subjected to violence. In previous years, there were reports that some Christian converts from Islam who publicized their religious beliefs were harassed.

There are some reports of Christian-Muslim tension in the occupied territories. For example, on January 31, 2002, Palestinian Christian taxi driver stabbed and killed a Muslim during a dispute at the Qalandiya checkpoint. That night male friends and relatives of the Muslim retaliated by attacking Christian-owned shops and residences in Ramallah. In addition, there have been periodic accusations that Muslim members of the Tanzim militia deliberately opened fire on the Israeli neighborhood of Gilo from Christian areas in Beit Jala to draw IDF fire onto the Christian homes. Both Muslim and Christian Palestinians have accused Israeli officials of attempting to foster animosity among Palestinians by exaggerating reports of Muslim-Christian tensions.

Interfaith romance is a sensitive issue. Most Christian and Muslim families in the occupied territories encourage their children—especially their daughters—to marry within the faith. Couples who have challenged this societal norm have encountered considerable societal and familial opposition. For example, some Christian women who have married Muslim men received death threats from Christian family members and community figures.

In general, evangelical churches have not been welcomed by the more established Christian denominations.

The strong correlation between religion, ethnicity, and politics in the occupied territories at times imbues the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a religious dimension. The rhetoric of some Jewish and Muslim religious leaders has been harsher since the outbreak of the Intifada in October 2000. During the first year of the Intifada there were a number of attacks on Muslim and Jewish places of worship and religious shrines in the occupied territories.

There were some reports of settler violence against Palestinian religious establishments during the period covered by this report. According to press reports, on October 12, 2002, Israeli settlers in Hebron broke into the offices of the Waqf in Hebron and destroyed furniture and allegedly burned deeds to all of the Waqf's property in the city.

In October 2002, two men who appeared to be Orthodox Jews vandalized a neon crucifix on the roof of Our Lady of the Rosary Church in Jerusalem. At the end of the period covered by this report, there had been no arrests.

During the period covered by this report, Muslims on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif on two separate occasions threw stones over a high wall onto the Western Wall plaza where Jews were praying.

The rhetoric of some Jewish and Muslim religious leaders was harsh and at times constituted an incitement to violence during the period covered by this report. For

example, PA-controlled television stations frequently broadcast anti-Semitic statements by Palestinian political and spiritual leaders and PA officials. Some prominent Israelis also made public anti-Arab statements.

Although the PA temporarily removed almost all inciteful and religiously intolerant material in PA-controlled media for parts of the reporting period, Israeli activists report numerous examples from 2002 and early 2003 in which PA television shows invoked anti-Semitic messages or attempted to de-legitimize Jewish history in general. Israeli settler radio stations often depict Arabs as subhuman and call for Palestinians to be expelled from the West Bank.

There were instances of ultra-Orthodox Jews harassing Christians and Muslims. On several occasions during the period covered by this report, a group of ultra-Orthodox Jews known as the “Temple Mount Faithful” attempted to force their way inside the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. In addition, the same group periodically attempted to lay a cornerstone for the building of a new Jewish temple that would replace the Islamic Dome of the Rock shrine, an act that Muslims considered an affront. In May 2002 a group of Haredim (ultra-Orthodox Jews) interrupted an evangelical Christian conference in Jerusalem and threw a stink bomb into the congregation. Conference organizers accused the Haredim of stealing sound equipment during the incident.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem maintains an ongoing dialog with officials in the Palestinian Authority, and (in conjunction with Embassy Tel Aviv) with Israeli officials on human rights issues, including issues of religious freedom. The Consulate also maintains contacts with representatives of the Jerusalem Waqf—an Islamic trust and charitable organization that owns and manages large amounts of real estate, including the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount in Jerusalem—as well as with the various Christian churches and Jewish communities in Jerusalem.

The Consulate investigates allegations of abuses of religious freedom. During the period covered by this report, the Consulate investigated a range of charges, including allegations of damage to places of worship, allegations of incitement, and allegations concerning access to holy sites.

JORDAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, provided that religious practices are consistent with “public order and morality”; however, the Government continued to impose some restrictions on freedom of religion during the period covered by this report. According to the Constitution, Islam is the state religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Members of unrecognized religious groups and religious converts from Islam face legal discrimination and bureaucratic difficulties in personal status cases. The Government prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing Muslims.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Relations between Muslims and Christians in the country generally are amicable; however, adherents of unrecognized religions face some societal discrimination.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 35,637 square miles, and its population is approximately 5 million persons. More than 95 percent of the population are Sunni Muslim. Official government figures estimate that Christians make up 4 percent of the population; however, government and Christian officials privately estimate the true figure to be closer to 3 percent. There also are at least 20,000 Druze, a small number of Shi’a Muslims, and less than 800 adherents of the Baha’i faith. There are no statistics available regarding the number of atheists or persons who are not adherents of any particular religious faith.

Officially recognized Christian denominations include the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic (Melkite), Armenian Orthodox, Maronite Catholic, Assyrian, Anglican, Lutheran, Seventh-day Adventist, United Pentecostal, and Presbyterian Churches. Other churches, including the Baptist Church, the Free Evan-

gical Church, the Church of the Nazarene, the Assembly of God, and the Christian Missionary Alliance, are registered with the Ministry of Justice as "societies," but not as churches. Some Egyptian immigrants are adherents of the Coptic Church. There also are a number of Chaldean and Syriac Christians and Muslim Shi'a represented in the immigrant Iraqi population.

With few exceptions, there are no major geographic concentrations of particular religious groups. The cities of Husn, in the north, and Fuheis, near Amman, are predominantly Christian. Madaba and Karak, both south of Amman, have significant Christian populations. The northern part of the city of Azraq has a significant Druze population, as does Umm Al-Jamal in the city of Mafraq. There also are Druze populations in Amman and Zarka, and a smaller number of Druze in Irbid and Aqaba. There are a number of nonindigenous Shi'a living in the Jordan Valley and the south.

Foreign missionaries operating in the country include: the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons); Jehovah's Witnesses; Campus Crusaders for Christ; Life Agape; Intersarsity; Navigators; Christar; Arab World Ministries; Operation Mobilization; Southern Baptist International Mission Board; the Conservative Baptist; Frontiers; Brother Andrew; the Jesuits; Christian Brothers; Rosary Sisters; Benedictines; Anglican Church Mission Society; the Society of Friends (Quakers); Comboni Sisters; Little Sisters of Jesus; the Religious of Nazareth; Sisters of St. Dorothy; the Daughters of Mary the Helper (Salesian Sisters); the Little Sisters of Nazareth; the Little Family of the Annunciation; Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition; Basiliennes Chouerites; Focolare Sisters; Franciscans (OFM); Sons of Divine Providence (Don Orione Fathers); Association Fraternal International (AFI); Institute of the Incarnate Word; Franciscans of the Cross; Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine; Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM); Franciscan Missionaries of the Immaculate Heart of Mary; Daughters of Mary of the Enclosed Garden; Theresian Institute; and the Missionaries of Charity.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, provided that religious practices are consistent with "public order and morality"; however, the Government continued to impose some restrictions on freedom of religion during the period covered by this report. According to the Constitution, Islam is the state religion.

According to the Constitution, Islam is the state religion. While Christianity is recognized as a religion and non-Muslim citizens may profess and practice the Christian faith, churches must be accorded legal recognition through administrative procedures in order to own land and to perform marriages and other sacraments. The Prime Minister unofficially confers with an interfaith council of bishops representing officially registered local churches on all matters relating to the Christian community, including the registration of new churches in the country. The Government uses the following criteria when considering official recognition of Christian churches: faith does not contradict the nature of the Constitution, public ethics, customs, or traditions; the faith is recognized by the Middle East Council of Churches; the faith does not oppose the national religion; and the group includes some citizen followers.

According to the Government, the role of the State in religious affairs is limited to supervision. Groups that have practices that violate the law and the nature of society are prohibited; however, in practice, there were no reports that religious groups were banned.

Religious institutions, such as churches that wish to receive official government recognition, must apply to the Prime Ministry for registration. Recognized non-Muslim religious institutions do not receive subsidies; they are financially and administratively independent from the Government and are tax-exempt.

Religious instruction is mandatory for all Muslim students in public schools. Christian and Baha'i students are not required to attend courses in Islam, and Christian students are allowed religious instructions in public schools. During the period covered by this report, a local Orthodox Priest complained that public schools do not provide a satisfactory curriculum for Christian students in lieu of Islamic studies. In 1996 the late King Hussein and the Ministry of Education approved religious instruction for Christian students in public schools. In 1998 the Government launched an experimental program in four districts to incorporate Christian education in the public school curriculum. The Constitution provides that congregations have the right to establish schools for the education of their own members "provided that they comply with the general provision of the law and are subject to the control of government in matters relating to their curricula and orientation."

There are two major government-sponsored institutions that promote interfaith understanding: The Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies and the Royal Academy for Islamic Civilization Research (al-Bayt Foundation). Both institutions sponsor research, international conferences, and discussions on a wide range of religious, social, and historical questions from the perspective of both Muslims and Christians. The Government held an international Christian conference in government facilities in 2001.

The Muslim feasts of Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, the Prophet Mohammed's Birthday, the Prophet's Ascension, and the Islamic New Year are celebrated as national holidays. Christmas and the Gregorian Calendar New Year also are national holidays. Easter is a government holiday and Christians may request leave for other Christian feasts prescribed by the local Council of Bishops.

A member of the royal family (Prince Hassan) hosted in Amman an international, interfaith conference on "Rejecting Violence and Promoting Peace with Justice." The conference focused on interfaith dialog among the religious communities of Iraq, but included religious leaders and scholars from numerous countries.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There were no reports that the practice of any faith was prohibited; however, the Government does not officially recognize all religious groups. Some religious groups, while allowed to meet and practice their faith, complained of societal and/or official discrimination. In addition, not all Christian denominations have been accorded legal recognition as religions.

A member of the royal family (Prince Hassan) hosted in Amman an international, interfaith conference on "Rejecting Violence and Promoting Peace with Justice." The conference focused on interfaith dialog among the religious communities of Iraq, but included religious leaders and scholars from numerous countries.

The Government does not recognize the Druze or Baha'i faiths as religions but does not prohibit the practice of these faiths. The Druze face official discrimination but do not complain of social discrimination. Baha'is face both official and social discrimination. The Government does not record the bearer's religion on national identity cards issued to Druze or Baha'is. The small Druze and Baha'i communities do not have their own courts to adjudicate personal status and family matters; such matters are heard in Shari'a courts. The Government does not officially recognize the Druze temple in Azraq, and four social halls belonging to the Druze are registered as "societies." The Government does not permit Baha'is to register schools or places of worship.

The Government does not recognize Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Christ, or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but each denomination is allowed to conduct religious services and activities without interference.

The Government does not interfere with public worship by the country's Christian minority. Although the majority of Christians are allowed to practice freely, some activities, such as encouraging Muslims to convert to Christianity which is considered legally incompatible with Islam, are prohibited.

During the period covered by the report, local members of the Greek Orthodox Church complained that their local hierarchy consists of Greek clergy who are not responsive to some concerns of their local Arab constituency.

Shari'a law prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing Muslims. Conversion to the Muslim faith by Christians is allowed; however, a Muslim may not convert to another religion. The small number of Muslims who convert to other faiths claim societal and government discrimination. The Government does not fully recognize the legality of such conversions. Under Shari'a converts are regarded as apostates and legally may be denied their property and other rights; however, in practice this principle is not applied. According to the Government, it neither encourages nor prohibits apostasy. Converts from Islam do not fall under the jurisdiction of their new religion's laws in matters of personal status and still are considered Muslims under Shari'a. Converts to Islam remain under the jurisdiction of the Shari'a courts. Shari'a law prescribes the death penalty for Muslims who convert to another religion; however, there is no corresponding statute under national law, and such punishment never has been applied.

According to one Christian cleric, the Government generally does not prohibit citizens from proselytizing if it is within the limits of the law and based on "the principle of maintaining personal security and safety and provided that it does not contradict the customs and traditions of society." Government policy requires that foreign missionary groups (that the Government believes are not familiar with the customs and traditions of local society) refrain from public proselytizing "for the sake of their own personal safety from fundamentalist members of society that oppose such practices." In the past, the Government has taken action against some Chris-

tian proselytizers in response to the complaints of recognized Christian groups who charged that the activities of these missionaries “disrupt the cohesiveness and peace between religious groups in the society.”

During the period covered by the report, members of the local evangelical community reported increased attention from the Government. In December 2002, a foreign pastor and his wife claimed that a border official at the airport threatened to cancel their residency permits. The pastor claimed that the action was in response to his refusal to verify whether or not Muslims attend his church’s services. He and his wife left the country voluntarily and have not returned. In March, two members of the evangelical community complained that lower level government officials threatened to cancel their residency permits for activities that allegedly were inappropriate. When the Government became aware of this at higher levels, it dropped the matter. The two evangelicals remained in the country and have reported no subsequent problems.

Non-citizen Christian missionaries operate in the country but are subject to restrictions. Christian missionaries may not proselytize Muslims. During the period covered by this report, Christian mission groups in the country complained of difficulty in dealing with local inter-church politics.

In 2000 the governor of the Amman municipality closed indefinitely the office of Life Agape—an organization associated with the Baptist Church—after the director refused to sign a letter stating that he would not “deal with Muslims.” At the end of the period covered by this the members of the organization continue to meet at a Baptist Church in Amman, without objection from the Amman municipality.

The Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary (JETS), a Christian training school for pastors and missionaries, still had not been accredited by the end of the period covered by this report. As a result, students and faculty from the U.S. and elsewhere wishing to attend JETS still were unable to obtain student visas. JETS continued its operations with students studying on tourist visas.

Of the 110 seats in the Lower House of Parliament, 9 are reserved for Christians. No seats are reserved for Druze or adherents of other religious faiths. In June 2001, the King dissolved Parliament and charged the Government with drafting a new election law. The country’s parliamentary election law historically has limited the number of Islamists elected to Parliament. The Islamic Action Front (IAF), the country’s major Islamic party, participated in the June parliamentary elections, winning 18 of the 110 seats.

The Political Parties Law prohibits houses of worship from being used for political activity. The law was designed primarily to deny government opponents the ability to preach politically oriented sermons in mosques.

In early 2000, radical Islamists criticized a poem published by Muslim poet Musa Hawamdeh and the Government banned the book in which the poem was published. In July 2000, Hawamdeh, without retracting any portion of his poem, was acquitted on all charges in both the Shari’a and civil courts. After Hawamdeh’s acquittal, he was subpoenaed in October 2001 by the Shari’a Court because of technicalities in his previous case. In May, Hawamdeh was sentenced to 3 months in prison for apostasy. The Court of First Instance found that Hawamdeh had denied “undeniable facts from the Holy Koran.” Hawamdeh immediately challenged the verdict and remains free, pending the result of his appeal.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Trusts manages Islamic institutions and the construction of mosques. It also appoints imams, provides mosque staff salaries, manages Islamic clergy training centers, and subsidizes certain activities sponsored by mosques. The Government loosely monitors sermons at mosques and requires that speakers refrain from criticizing the royal family or instigating social or political unrest.

On January 16, the private weekly newspaper Al Hilal was shut down and three of its journalists were arrested and accused of “harming the dignity of Muslims” (or blasphemy) by publishing an article about the Prophet Muhammad’s sexual relationship with his wives, according to some legends. In February all three were found guilty, with the prison sentences of two journalists commuted to fines, and the author being sentenced to 6 months’ incarceration. The newspaper has since resumed publication.

According to the Constitution, religious community trusts (“Awqaf”) and matters of personal status such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance, fall within the exclusive jurisdiction of the Shari’a courts for Muslims, and separate non-Muslim tribunals for each religious community recognized by the Government. There is no provision for civil marriage or divorce. The head of the department that manages Shari’a court affairs (a cabinet-level position) appoints Shari’a judges, while each recognized non-Muslim religious community selects the structure and members of its own tribunal. All judicial nominations are approved by the Prime

Minister and commissioned officially by royal decree. The Protestant denominations registered as “societies” come under the jurisdiction of one of the recognized Protestant church tribunals. There are no tribunals assigned for atheists or adherents of unrecognized religions. Such individuals must request one of the recognized courts to hear their personal status cases.

Shari’a is applied in all matters relating to family law involving Muslims or the children of a Muslim father, and all citizens, including non-Muslims, are subject to Islamic legal provisions regarding inheritance.

All minor children of a male citizen who converts to Islam automatically are considered to be Muslim. Adult children of a male Christian who has converted to Islam become ineligible to inherit from their father if they do not themselves convert to Islam. In cases in which a Muslim converts to Christianity, the conversion is not recognized legally by the authorities, and the individual continues to be treated as a Muslim in matters of family and property law. The minor children of a male Muslim who converts to Christianity continue to be treated as Muslims under the law.

In 1998 legal custody of two children of a Christian woman living in Irbid was granted, against her will, to the Muslim brother of her deceased husband. A civil court held that Shari’a law revoked the mother’s custody of the children because she had failed to raise them as Muslims. The children had been raised as Christians because both their mother and father originally were Christian. Their father converted to Islam shortly before his death. As a result of his alleged conversion, the children were considered to be Muslim as a matter of Shari’a law; however, the mother lawfully remained Christian. The civil court rejected the mother’s final appeal in February 2002. The court’s final judgment had yet to be enforced by the end of the period covered by this report, and the children continue to live with their mother and attend a local school.

Some Christians are unable to divorce under the legal system because they are subject to their faith’s religious court system, which does not allow divorce. Many such individuals convert to another Christian denomination or the Muslim faith in order to divorce legally.

The Government notes individuals’ religions (except for Druze, Baha’is, and other unrecognized religions) on the national identity card and “family book” (a national registration record that is issued to the head of every family and that serves as proof of citizenship) of all citizens. Atheists must associate themselves with a recognized religion for official identification purposes.

The Government traditionally reserves some positions in the upper levels of the military for Christians; however, all senior command positions traditionally have been reserved for Muslims. Division-level commanders and above are required to lead Islamic prayer for certain occasions. There is no Christian clergy in the military.

During the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, all citizens, including non-Muslims, are discouraged from eating, drinking, or smoking in public or in vehicles and are discouraged strongly from dressing in a manner that is considered inconsistent with Islamic standards. Restaurants are closed during daylight hours unless specifically exempted by the Government. Only those facilities catering specifically to tourists are allowed to remain open during the daytime and sell alcohol during the month of Ramadan.

Under Shari’a as applied in the country, female heirs receive half the amount of a male heir’s inheritance, and non-Muslim widows of Muslim spouses have no inheritance rights. A sole female heir receives half of her parents’ estate; the balance goes to designated male relatives. A sole male heir inherits both of his parents’ property. Male Muslim heirs have the duty to provide for all family members who need assistance. Men are able to divorce their spouses more easily than women are, although a law passed in December 2001 allows women to divorce their husbands in Shari’a court. Since the law went into effect, Shari’a courts have granted several divorces brought by women.

According to government legal officials, civil, criminal, and commercial courts accord equal weight to the testimony of men and women. However, in Shari’a court, the testimony of two women is equal to that of a man’s in most circumstances.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners who remained in custody at the end of the period covered by this report; however, in 2000 and 2001 the security services detained approximately 50 persons, described in the press as Islamists. Such detentions were related to allegations of involvement in terrorist or strictly political activities rather than religious affiliation or belief.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States. However, according to the law the father of the child may restrict a child's travel. There are at least 10 U.S. citizen children of mixed-religion marriages residing in Jordan against the will of their U.S. citizen mothers. Under the law, such children are considered Muslim if their fathers are Muslim.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between Muslims and Christians in the country generally are amicable. Relations within the Christian community sometimes are difficult, especially among the evangelical Christian community. There are disputes between and within different Christian denominations.

In general Christians do not suffer discrimination. Christians hold high-level government and private sector positions and are represented in the media and academia approximately in proportion to their presence in the general population. Senior command positions in the military traditionally have been reserved for Muslims (see Section II). Baha'is face some societal and official discrimination. Employment applications occasionally contain questions about an applicant's religion.

The majority of the indigenous population views religion as central to personal identity and religious conversions are not tolerated widely. Muslims who convert to other religions often face social ostracism, threats, and abuse from their families and Muslim religious leaders. There is anecdotal evidence that the number of romantic relationships between members of different religions is growing. Such relationships, which ultimately may lead to conversion (either to the Muslim or Christian faiths), usually are strongly discouraged by the families. Interfaith relationships may lead to ostracism and, in some cases, violence against the couple, or feuds between members of the couple's families. When such situations arise, families may approach local government officials for resolution. There were reports that in some cases, local government officials encouraged Christian women involved in relationships with Muslim men to convert to Islam in order to defuse potential family or tribal problems; however, during the period covered by this report, there were no known cases in which local officials harassed or coerced persons to convert from Christianity to Islam. During the period covered by this report, there were some cases of mixed-faith married couples seeking to emigrate to other countries because of the negative family and societal reactions to their marriages.

During the period covered by this report, local newspapers occasionally published articles critical of evangelical organizations.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. U.S. Embassy officials raised religious freedom and other human rights issues with government authorities on a number of occasions. Embassy officers met frequently with members of the various religious and missionary communities in the country, as well as with private religious organizations. Embassy officers assisted private religious groups to obtain official registration during the period covered by this report. The Embassy's American Citizens' Services officer is in regular contact with members of the American missionary community in the country.

KUWAIT

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government places some limits on this right. The Constitution also provides that the State protect the freedom to practice religion in accordance with established customs, "provided that it does not conflict with public policy or morals." The Constitution states that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a (Islamic law) is "a main source of legislation."

There was no major change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report; however, construction proceeded on three new Shi'a mosques approved in 2001 and an Apostolic Nunciature continued to represent Vatican interests in the region.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country's total area is 6,880 square miles, and its population is 2.4 million. Of the country's total population, approximately 1.6 million persons are Muslim, including the vast majority of its nearly 900,000 citizens. The remainder of the overall population consists of the large foreign labor force and tens of thousands of "Bidoon" (officially stateless) Arabs with residence ties to the country who claim to have no documentation of their nationality. While the national census does not distinguish between Sunni and Shi'a adherents, the majority of citizens, including the ruling family, belong to the Sunni branch of Islam. The total Sunni Muslim population is well over 1 million approximately 600,000 of whom are citizens. The remaining 30 to 35 percent of Muslim citizens (approximately 270,000–315,000) are Shi'a, as are approximately 100,000 non-citizen residents. Estimates of the nominal Christian population range from 250,000 to 500,000 (including approximately 200 citizens, most of whom belong to 12 large families).

The Christian community includes the Roman Catholic Diocese, with 2 churches and an estimated 100,000 members (Latin, Maronite, Greek Catholic, Coptic Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Malabar, and Malankara congregations worship at the Catholic cathedral in Kuwait city); the Anglican (Episcopalian) Church, with 115 members (several thousand other Christians also use the Anglican Church for worship services); the National Evangelical Church (Protestant), with 3 main congregations (Arabic, English, and "Malayalee") and 15,000 members (several other Christian denominations also worship at the National Evangelical Church Compound); the Greek Orthodox Church (referred to in Arabic as the "Roman Orthodox" Church, a reference to the Eastern Roman Empire of Byzantium), with 3,500 members; the Armenian Orthodox Church, with 4,000 members; the Coptic Orthodox Church, with 70,000 members; and the Greek Catholic (Eastern Rite) Church, whose membership totals are unavailable. In September 2001, diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Kuwait were upgraded to ambassadorial status.

There are many other unrecognized Christian denominations in the country, with tens of thousands of members. These denominations include Seventh-day Adventists, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Marthoma, and the Indian Orthodox Syrian Church.

There are also communities of Hindus (estimated 100,000 adherents), Sikhs (estimated 10,000), Baha'is (estimated 400), and Buddhists (no statistics available).

Missionary groups in the country serve non-Muslim congregations.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government places some limits on this right. The Constitution also provides that the State protect the freedom to practice religion in accordance with established customs, "provided that it does not conflict with public policy or morals." The Constitution states Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a (Islamic law) is "a main source of legislation and that Shari'a is "a main source of legislation." The Government observes Islamic holidays.

The procedures for registration and licensing of religious groups are unclear. The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs has official responsibility for overseeing religious groups. Officially recognized churches must deal with a variety of government entities, including the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (for visas and residence permits for pastors and other staff) and the municipality of Kuwait (for building permits). While there reportedly is no official government list of recognized churches, seven Christian churches have at least some form of official recognition that enables them to operate openly. These seven churches have open "files" at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, allowing them to bring in the pastors and staff necessary to operate their churches. Three of the country's churches are widely understood to enjoy "full recognition" by the Government and are allowed to operate compounds officially designated as churches: The Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, and the National Evangelical Protestant Church of Kuwait; however, they face quotas on the number of staff they can bring in, and their existing facilities are clearly inadequate to serve their respective communities.

The other four churches—Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, and Greek Catholicism—reportedly are allowed to operate openly, hire employees, invite religious speakers, etc., without interference from the Government; however,

their compounds are, according to government records, registered only as private homes. Church officials themselves appear uncertain about the guidelines or procedures for recognition. Some claim that these procedures are purposely kept vague by the Government to maintain the status quo. No other churches and religions have legal status but they are allowed to operate in private homes.

The procedures for registration and licensing of religious groups also appear to be connected with government restrictions on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), religious or otherwise. In 1993 all unlicensed organizations were ordered by the Council of Ministers to cease their activities. This order never has been enforced; however, since that time all but three applications by NGOs have been frozen. There were reports that in the last few years at least two groups have applied for permission to build their own churches, but the Government has not responded to their requests. The Government announced in October 2001 that all unlicensed branches of Islamic charities would be closed by the end of 2002. During the period covered by this report, the Government removed a large number of unlicensed streetside charity boxes. In August 2002, the Acting Minister of Social Affairs and Labor issued a ministerial decree to create a charitable organizations department within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. The new department has been established with the mandate to regulate Kuwaiti-based religious charities by reviewing their applications for registration, monitor the operations of charities, and establish a new accounting system to comply with regulations of charity based operations.

The following religious holidays are considered national holidays: Eid al-Adha, Islamic New Year, Prophet's Birthday, and Eid al-Fitr.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Shi'a are free to worship according to their faith without government interference; however, members of the Shi'a community have expressed concern about the scarcity of Shi'a mosques due to the Government's slow approval of the construction of new Shi'a mosques and the repair of existing mosques. (There are approximately 36 Shi'a mosques, compared to 1,300 Sunni mosques, in the country.) During the period covered by this report, no additional Shi'a mosques were guaranteed beyond the three approved for construction in 2001. The Shi'a appellate court for family law cases and the Shi'a charity authority established in 2001 reportedly are operating smoothly. The Government did not, however, approve the Shi'a request for their own Awqaf.

Shi'a who aspire to serve as imams are forced to seek appropriate training and education abroad due to the lack of Shi'a jurisprudence courses at Kuwait University's College of Islamic Law, which only offers Sunni jurisprudence courses. The Ministry of Education is still reviewing an application to establish a private college to train Shi'a clerics within the country. If approved the new college could reduce Shi'a dependence on foreign study, for the training of Shi'a clerics.

The Roman Catholic, Anglican, National Evangelical, Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, and Greek Catholic Churches operate freely on their compounds, holding worship services without government interference. Their leaders also state that the Government generally has been supportive of their presence, even providing police security and traffic control as needed. Other Christian denominations (including Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, Marthoma, and Indian Orthodox) are not recognized legally, but are allowed to operate in private homes or in the facilities of recognized churches. Members of these congregations have reported that they are able to worship without government interference, provided that they do not disturb their neighbors and do not violate laws regarding assembly and proselytizing.

Members of religions not sanctioned in the Koran, such as Hindus and Buddhists, may not build places of worship, but are allowed to worship privately in their homes without interference from the Government.

In January 2002, after mounting pressure from citizens in the district of Salwa, the Government ordered the closure of the Sikh gurudwara, or temple. Sikhs who had worshipped there were still able to worship at another Sikh temple. During the period covered by this report, the closed temple was allowed to reopen.

The Government prohibits missionaries from proselytizing to Muslims; however, they may serve non-Muslim congregations. The law prohibits organized religious education for religions other than Islam, although this law is not enforced rigidly. Informal religious instruction occurs inside private homes and on church compounds without government interference; however, there were reports that government inspectors from the Awqaf Ministry periodically visit public and private schools outside of church compounds to ensure that religious teaching other than Islam does not take place. The Roman Catholic Church has requested that Catholic students be allowed to study the catechism separately during the period in which Muslim

students receive mandatory instruction in Islam. During the period covered by this report, the Government still had not responded to the request.

The Roman Catholic Church faces problems of overcrowding at its two official church facilities. Its cathedral in downtown Kuwait City regularly draws as many as 100,000 worshippers to its more than 30 weekly services. Due to limited space on the compound, the church is unable to construct any new buildings. The National Evangelical Church also faces overcrowding at its compound, which serves a weekly average of 20,000 worshippers in 55 congregations.

There has been no change in the status of the Coptic Church since the Government notified it last year of its intention to appropriate the parcel of land on which the country's only Coptic church is located for a road project. The Government plans to grant the Church a land parcel of equal or greater size in the same general vicinity to relocate the church, but it has not guaranteed financial assistance to construct a new church.

The Government does not permit the establishment of non-Islamic publishing companies or training institutions for clergy. Nevertheless, several churches publish religious materials for use solely by their congregations. Further, some churches, in the privacy of their compounds, provide informal instruction to individuals interested in joining the clergy.

A private company, the Book House Company Ltd., is permitted to import a significant number of Bibles and other Christian religious material—including videotapes and compact discs—for use solely among the congregations of the country's recognized churches. The Book House Company is the only bookstore that has an import license to bring in such materials, which also must be approved by government censors. There have been reports of private citizens having non-Islamic religious materials confiscated by customs officials upon arrival at the airport.

Although there is a small community of Christian citizens, a law passed in 1980 prohibits the naturalization of non-Muslims; however, citizens who were Christians before 1980 (and children born to families of such citizens since that date) are allowed to transmit their citizenship to their children.

According to the law, a non-Muslim male must convert to Islam when he marries a Muslim woman if the wedding is to be legal in the country. A non-Muslim female is not required to convert to Islam to marry a Muslim male, but it is to her advantage to do so. Failure to convert may mean that, should the couple later divorce, the Muslim father would be granted custody of any children.

Women continue to experience legal and social discrimination. In the family courts, one man's testimony is sometimes given the same weight as the testimony of two women; however, in the civil, criminal, and administrative courts, the testimony of women and men is considered equally. Unmarried women 21 years old and over are free to obtain a passport and travel abroad at any time; however, a married woman who applies for a passport must obtain her husband's signature on the application form. Once she has a passport, a married woman does not need her husband's permission to travel, but he may prevent her departure from the country by contacting the immigration authorities and placing a 24-hour travel ban on her. After this 24-hour period, a court order is required if the husband still wishes to prevent his wife from leaving the country. All minor children must have their father's permission to travel outside of the country.

Inheritance is governed by Islamic law, which differs according to the branch of Islam. In the absence of a direct male heir, Shi'a women may inherit all property, while Sunni women inherit only a portion, with the balance divided among brothers, uncles, and male cousins of the deceased.

The law requires jail terms for journalists who defame religion. There were no reports during the period covered by this report of Islamists using this law to threaten writers with prosecution for publishing opinions deemed insufficiently observant of Islamic norms as had occurred in the past, nor of religiously based prosecutions of authors or journalists.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversions

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States. There have been cases in which U.S. citizen children have been abducted from the United States and not allowed to return under the law; however, there were no reports that such children were forced to convert to Islam, or that forced conversion was the reason that they were not allowed to return.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The overall situation for Shi'a improved during the period covered by this report. The Government approved the construction of 3 new Shi'a mosques in addition to the 3 that were approved in 2001, bringing the total to 36 Shi'a mosques in the country. The Government is currently considering a request to establish a Shi'a "Supreme Court" to handle matters of family law. The Government now allows Shi'a to follow their own jurisprudence in matters of personal status at the first instance and appellate levels, but not yet at the cassation level. Shi'a leaders no longer express concern that proposed legislation in the National Assembly does not take their beliefs into account.

An Apostolic Nunciature, headed by an Apostolic Nuncio, accredited to Kuwait, Bahrain, and Yemen, was upgraded from charge d'affaires to full ambassadorial status in September 2001, to represent Vatican interests in the region. The Vatican Ambassador is resident in Kuwait City. The Catholic Church views the Government's agreement to upgrade to full diplomatic relations with the Vatican as significant in terms of government tolerance of Christianity. The Ministry of Education has announced its intention to combat religious intolerance by clarifying the concept of "jihad" in school curricula; this initiative encountered strong condemnation from Islamist members of parliament. During the year, the Ministry removed teachers thought to be Islamic extremists.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

In general there are amicable relations among the various religions, and citizens generally are open and tolerant of other religions; however there is a small minority of ultraconservatives opposed to the presence of non-Muslim groups.

While some discrimination based on religion reportedly occurs on a personal level, most observers agree that it is not widespread. There is a perception among some domestic employees and other members of the unskilled labor force, particularly nationals of Southeast Asian countries, that they would receive better treatment from employers as well as society as a whole if they converted to Islam; however, others do not see conversion to Islam as a factor in this regard.

The conversion of Muslims to other religions is a very sensitive matter. While such conversions reportedly have occurred, they have been done quietly and discreetly. Known converts face harassment, including loss of job, repeated summonses to police stations, and imposition of fines without due process.

In May the Awqaf Minister advised Kuwait's imams "not to pray against Christians." In response, however, some Muslim leaders argued that it is the duty of Muslims to foster hatred for Christians and Jews. While some individuals incite hatred for Christians and Jews, in general the society is peaceful and tolerant. Hostility towards Israel is pervasive, but typically comes with a disavowal of hostility towards the Jewish religion. After Kuwaiti Al Qa'ida sympathizers murdered a Marine in October, mainstream Muslim leaders made efforts to teach that Islam forbids such acts and prescribes peaceful relations. During the period covered by this report, on several occasions local newspapers have published photographs of Christian worship in Kuwait, in a factual, non-critical manner.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of the promoting human rights.

U.S. Embassy officials frequently meet with representatives from Sunni, Shi'a, and various Christian groups. Intensive monitoring of religious issues has long been an embassy priority. Embassy officers have met with most of the leaders of the country's recognized Christian churches, as well as representatives of various unrecognized faiths. Such meetings have afforded embassy officials the opportunity to learn the status and concerns of these groups.

LEBANON

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there are some restrictions.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Discrimination based on religion is built into the system of government. The Government subsidizes all religions and all religious judges receive monthly salaries from the Government.

Citizens still struggle with the legacy of a 15-year civil war fought along religious lines. There are periodic reports of friction between religious groups; however, it frequently is difficult to distinguish between political and religious differences. There are no legal barriers to proselytizing; however, traditional attitudes and edicts of the clerical establishment discourage such activity.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 4,035 square miles, and its population is approximately 4 million; however, because the matter of religious balance remains such a sensitive political issue, a national census has not been conducted since 1932, before the founding of the modern State. Consequently there is an absence of accurate data on the relative percentages of the population of the major religions and groups. Most observers believe that Muslims, at approximately 70 percent of the population, make up the majority, but do not represent a homogenous group. There also are a variety of other religious groups, primarily Christian denominations, which constitute approximately 23 percent of the population, as well as a small Jewish population. There are also some very small numbers of Baha'is, Buddhists, and Hindus in the country.

There are 18 officially recognized religious groups. Their ecclesiastical and demographic patterns are extremely complex. Divisions and rivalries between groups date back as far as 15 centuries, and still are a factor. The pattern of settlement has changed little since the seventh century, although there has been a steady numerical decline in the number of Christians compared to Muslims. The main branches of Islam are Shi'a and Sunni. Since the Eleventh century, there has been a sizable Druze presence, concentrated in rural, mountainous areas east and south of Beirut. The smallest Muslim minorities are the Alawites and the Ismaili ("Sevener") Shi'a order. The "Twelver" Shi'a, Sunni, and Druze each have state-appointed clerical bodies to administer family and personal status law through their own religious courts, which the Government subsidizes. The Maronites are the largest of the Christian groups. They have had a long and continuous association with the Roman Catholic Church, but have their own patriarch, liturgy, and customs. The second largest Christian group is the Greek Orthodox Church (composed of ethnic Arabs who maintain a Greek-language liturgy). The remainder of the Christians are divided among Greek Catholics, Armenian Orthodox (Gregorians), Armenian Catholics, Syrian Orthodox (Jacobites), Syrian Catholics, Assyrians (Nestorians), Chaldeans, Copts, evangelicals (including Protestant groups such as the Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and Friends), and Latins (Roman Catholic).

There are a number of foreign missionaries operating in the country, primarily from Catholic and evangelical Christian churches.

Many persons fleeing alleged religious mistreatment and discrimination in neighboring states reside in the country, including Kurds, Shi'a, and Chaldeans from Iraq and Coptic Christians from Egypt and Sudan.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there are some restrictions. The Constitution provides for the free exercise of all religious rites with the caveat that public order not be disturbed. The Constitution also provides that the personal status and religious interests of the population be respected. The Government permits recognized religions to exercise authority over matters pertaining to personal status such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. There is no state religion; however, politics are based on the principle of religious representation, which has been applied to every conceivable aspect of public life. The unwritten "National Pact" of 1943 stipulates that the President, the Prime Minister, and the Speaker of Parliament be a Maronite Christian, a Sunni Muslim, and a Shi'a Muslim, respectively. The 1989 Taif Accord, which ended the country's 15-year civil war, reaffirmed this arrangement but resulted in increased Muslim representation in Parliament and reduced the power of the Maronite President.

State recognition is a legal requirement for religious groups to conduct certain religious practice. A group that seeks official recognition must submit its dogma and moral principles for government review to ensure that such principles do not contradict popular values and the Constitution. The group must ensure that the number of its adherents is sufficient to maintain its continuity.

Alternatively, religious groups may apply to obtain recognition through existing religious groups. Official recognition conveys certain benefits, such as tax-exempt status and the right to apply the religion's codes to personal status matters. An individual may change religions if the head of the religious group the person wishes to join approves of this change.

In November 2002, the Ministry of Interior notified the "Israelite Communal Council" that the Ministry had been informed about the election of a new board for the Council. This step renewed official government recognition of the Council as the body representing the Jewish community in the country. The Council has been an officially recognized sect in the country since 1926 and has approximately 60 followers. The Government's last official recognition of the Council was in 1985.

Citizens belonging to a faith not recognized by the Government can perform their religious rites freely. However, given the confessional nature of the political system, their political rights are not secured. For example, a Baha'i cannot run for Parliament because there is not a seat allocated for this confession, neither can he/she secure a senior position in the Government as these seats are also allocated on a confessional basis. However, a number of religious faiths are recorded in the country under the existing recognized religions. For example, most Baha'i are registered under the Shi'a sect and thus Baha'i can run for office under a Shi'a seat. Similarly, Mormons are registered under the Greek Orthodox faith. Decisions on granting official recognition of religious groups do not appear to be arbitrary; in recent years, the Government has recognized such groups as the Alawites and the Copts.

The Government allows private religious education. In 2002 Muslim and Christian clergy finalized a set of unified religious education material to be used in public schools. However, the materials have not yet been included in school curricula.

The Government permits publishing of religious materials in different languages.

The Government promotes interfaith understanding by supporting a committee on Islamic-Christian dialog, which is co-chaired by a Muslim and a Christian, and includes representatives of the major religious groups. Leading religious figures who promote Islamic-Christian dialog and ecumenism are encouraged to visit and are received by government officials at the highest levels. Clerics play a leading role in many ecumenical movements worldwide. For example, the Armenian Orthodox Patriarch, Aram I, is the moderator for the World Council of Churches. The Imam Musa Sadr Foundation also has played a role in fostering the ecumenical message of Musa Sadr, a Shi'a cleric who disappeared in Libya in 1978. UNESCO funded a \$10,000 project for the publication of a book on Christian-Islamic understanding in the country. The book was authored by 16 Muslim and Christian scholars and has been available on the local market since August 2002.

The following religious holidays are considered national holidays: Christmas, Good Friday, Easter (for both Western and Eastern rites), St. Maroun Day, All Saints Day, Feast of the Assumption, New Year, Eid al-Adha, the Muslim New Year, the Prophet Mohammed's birthday, Eid al-Fitr, and Ashura. During the period covered by this report, the Government also announced Armenian Christmas as an official holiday and excuses from work public sector employees of the Armenian churches on St. Vartan Day.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The 1989 Taif Accord called for the ultimate abolition of political sectarianism in favor of "expertise and competence." However, little substantive progress has been made in this regard. Christians and Muslims are represented equally in the Parliament, the Cabinet, and first category civil service positions. First category civil service positions include the ranks of Secretary General and Director General. One notable exception is the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which, through universal conscription and an emphasis on professionalism, has significantly reduced the role of confessionalism in that organization. Seats in the Parliament and Cabinet, and posts in the civil service, are distributed proportionally among the 18 recognized groups.

Officially unrecognized groups such as Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus, and some evangelical denominations may own property and assemble for worship without government interference; however, they legally may not marry, divorce, or inherit in the country. Protestant evangelical churches are required to register with the Evangelical Synod, which represents those churches to the Government. Representatives of some churches have complained that the Synod has refused to accept new members since 1975, thereby crippling their clergy's ability to administer to communities in accordance with their beliefs.

Many families have relatives who belong to different religious communities, and intermarriage is not uncommon; however, intermarriage may be difficult to arrange in practice between members of some groups because there are no procedures for

civil marriage. However, the Government recognizes civil ceremonies performed outside the country.

There are no legal barriers to proselytizing; however, traditional attitudes and edicts of the clerical establishment strongly discourage such activity. There were reports that members of the Maronite Christian community in Kesirwan, with the knowledge of local clergy, occasionally harassed verbally church leaders and persons who attend an officially unrecognized Protestant evangelical church.

The Government does not require citizens' religious affiliations to be indicated on their passports; however, the Government requires that religious affiliation be encoded on national identity cards.

Religious groups administer their own family and personal status laws (see Section II). Many of these laws discriminate against women. For example, Sunni inheritance law provides a son twice the inheritance of a daughter. Although Muslim men may divorce easily, Muslim women may do so only with the concurrence of their husbands.

Article 473 of the Penal Code stipulates that one who "blasphemes God publicly" may face imprisonment for up to 1 year. There were no prosecutions reported under this law during the period covered by this report.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Despite the years of conflict and civil strife, tolerance and consensus among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The Sunni and Shiite religious and political leaderships generally have maintained amicable relations in spite of the various political differences and their differences have not resulted in conflict or violence. Most of the issues at stake concern political or development issues and each party/confession seeks to mobilize as much popular support as possible to obtain its goals. The same applies to other religious communities in the country.

There were some incidents during the period covered by this report of violence against religious persons and buildings. In May a bomb exploded outside the home of a Western Christian missionary in Tripoli, North Lebanon killing one person.

In December 2002, a bomb blast destroyed a mosque and shrine in the east near the border with Syria but injured no one. A 110 pound explosive charge was planted on the mosque grounds in the town of Anjar, home to a large Armenian community. Local residents say a Muslim charitable endowment that owns the mosque grounds had been involved in long-running disputes with local people over land ownership in the area. Authorities are investigating the attack on the shrine, which is estimated to date back 800 years and was a popular pilgrimage site for Sunni Muslims. Local Muslim clerics severely criticized the attack, which occurred as Muslims prepared for the 'Eid al-Fitr feast marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan.

Also in December 2002, a Sunni army conscript shot a Christian conscript. The security forces chased the culprit and killed him in an exchange of gunfire. Security forces arrested one Sunni cleric and charged him with inciting confessional violence.

In November 2002, an American citizen missionary affiliated with the Christian and Missionary Evangelical Alliance was killed in Sidon. No group has claimed responsibility for the killing, although it is believed that Sunni extremists, possibly operating from the nearby Ain al-Hilwah Palestinian refugee camp, were responsible.

In October 2002, a Greek Orthodox Church in Tripoli and the Saint Elias Maronite Church in Sidon were bombed. Later that month, arsonists set fire to a mosque in Batroun. President Lahoud blamed "Israeli sympathizers" for the Batroun incident. There were no arrests in connection with any of these crimes at the end of the period covered by this report.

In August 2002, Ahmad Mansur, an employee at the teachers fund office shot and killed eight of his fellow colleagues. Mansur claimed that he committed the crime for confessional reasons. Seven of the eight victims were Christians. Mansur was arrested and in April, the judicial tribunal (Supreme Court) sentenced him to death. The sentence has not yet been carried out.

In 1999 Sunni extremists killed four LAF soldiers in an ambush in the northern region of Dinniyeh after the soldiers attempted to arrest two Sunni Muslims allegedly involved in a series of church bombings. The LAF retaliated by launching a massive military operation against Sunni extremists in the north. A total of 5 civilians, 7 LAF soldiers, and 15 extremists were killed in the operation. In May 2002,

some of the suspects went on a hunger strike for a few days to protest trial delays and seek improvements in their detention conditions. The trial of the suspects who were involved in the case was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

The Arab-Israeli conflict and Israel's long-occupation of South Lebanon nurtured a strong intolerance for Israelis and, in most cases, Lebanese media refers to the State of Israel as "the Jewish State." Hizballah, through its media outlets, regularly directs strong rhetoric against Israel and its Jewish population, and characterizes events in the region as part of a "Zionist conspiracy."

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Embassy advances that goal through contacts at all levels of society, public remarks, embassy public affairs programs, and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) programming. The issue of political sectarianism remains a delicate one. The United States supports the principles of the Taif Accord and embassy staff regularly discuss the issue of sectarianism with political, religious, and civic leaders.

The State Department funded the Institute of World Affairs, a Washington-based non governmental organization to run a 3-year religious reconciliation project for Muslims and Maronite Christians in three villages in the country. The project added a fourth village and is being modeled for reconciliation efforts elsewhere in the Middle East. In late 2002, during Ramadan, the Ambassador hosted a series of iftars (evening meals breaking the daily fast) attended by a number of persons from various confessional denominations. Embassy staff regularly attends events sponsored by the Committee on Islamic-Christian Dialog. USAID programs in rural areas of the country also require civic participation, often involving villages of different religious backgrounds, with the aim of promoting cooperation between religions.

LIBYA

The Government restricts freedom of religion. Although Libya is a dictatorship, the Government is tolerant of other faiths, with the exception of fundamentalist or militant Islam, which it views as a threat to the regime.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report; persons rarely are harassed because of their religious practices unless such practices are perceived as having a political dimension or motivation.

Information regarding relations among the country's different religious groups is limited.

The U.S. Government has no official presence in the country and maintains no bilateral dialog with the Government.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country's total land area is approximately 679,362 square miles, and its population is approximately 5,240,599. The country is overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim (97 percent); there is no significant Shi'ite presence. There are small Christian communities, composed almost exclusively of foreigners. A small Anglican community comprised of one resident priest and mostly African immigrant workers in Tripoli is part of the Egyptian Diocese; the Anglican Bishop of Libya is resident in Cairo. There are Union churches in Tripoli and Benghazi. There are an estimated 40,000 Roman Catholics who are served by two Bishops—one in Tripoli and one in Benghazi; both communities are multi-national. Catholic priests and nuns serve in all the main coastal cities, and there is one priest in the southern city of Sebha. Most of them work in hospitals and with the handicapped; they enjoy good relations with the Government. The Catholic bishop, priests and nuns wear religious dress freely in public and report virtually no discrimination. There are also Coptic and Greek Orthodox priests in both Tripoli and Benghazi.

In 1997 the Vatican established diplomatic relations with the country, stating that the country had taken steps to protect freedom of religion. Its goal was to address the needs of the estimated 50,000 Christians in the country more adequately. There is an accredited Nuncio resident in Rome and a bishop resident in Tripoli.

There still may be a very small number of Jews. Most of the Jewish community, which numbered around 35,000 in 1948, left for Israel at various stages between

1948 and 1967. The Government has been rehabilitating the “medina” (old city) in Tripoli and has renovated the large synagogue there; however, the synagogue did not reopen during the period covered by this report.

Adherents of other non-Muslim religions, such as Hindus, Baha'is, and Buddhists, are present.

There is no information on the number of foreign missionaries in the country. As in other Muslim countries, Christian churches are not allowed to proselytize, although generally, this restriction is not observed.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Government restricts freedom of religion. The country's leadership states publicly its preference for Islam, although it is aggressively opposed to more conservative or militant strains of Islam, which it views as a threat to the regime. The Government has banned the once powerful Sanusiyya Islamic order; in its place, Libyan leader Colonel Mu'ammar Al-Qadhafi established the Islamic Call Society (ICS), which is the Islamic arm of the Government's foreign policy and is active throughout the world. The ICS also is responsible for relations with other religions, including the Christian churches in the country. The ICS's main purpose is to promote a moderate form of Islam that reflects the religious views of the Government, and there are reports that Islamic groups whose beliefs and practices are at variance with the state-approved teaching of Islam are banned. Although most Islamic institutions are under government control, prominent families endow some mosques; however, the mosques generally adhere to the government-approved interpretation of Islam.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government controls most mosques and Islamic institutions, and even mosques endowed by prominent families generally remain within the government-approved interpretation of Islam. According to recent reports, individuals rarely are harassed because of their religious practices, unless such practices are perceived as having a political dimension or motivation.

Members of minority religions are allowed to conduct services. Christian churches operate openly and are tolerated by the authorities; the Government routinely grants visas and residence papers to religious staff from other nations. The former Catholic church in the medina is being restored and may be used as a church again. The Government has not yet honored a promise made in 1970 to provide the Anglican Church with alternative facilities when it took the property used by the Church. Since 1988 the Anglicans have shared a villa with other Protestant denominations.

Orthodox priests have been allowed to visit six Bulgarian medics held since 1999 for allegedly infecting 400 children with HIV, and the medics themselves have been allowed to attend Orthodox services under guard.

There are no known places of worship for other non-Muslim religions such as Hinduism, the Baha'i Faith, and Buddhism, although adherents are allowed to practice within the privacy of their homes. Foreign adherents of these religions are allowed to display and sell religious items at bazaars and other gatherings.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On February 16, a People's Court in Tripoli sentenced to death Salem Abu Hanak and Abdullah Ahmed Izzedin, 2 out of at least 152 professionals who were arbitrarily arrested in 1998 in Benghazi for involvement with Islamic organizations. Eighty-six of the 152 men were sentenced while 66 were acquitted. Those who were convicted received sentences ranging from 10 years to life imprisonment. The appellate hearing began on December 14, 2002. Amnesty International (AI) reported that lawyers for the accused were neither allowed to study their case files nor were they allowed to meet with their clients. The lawyers were denied access to the court, and the judge appointed government clerks to replace them. Family members were allowed to meet the accused briefly for the first time since their arrest in April 2001, but were not able to do so again until at least December 2001.

Some practicing Muslims have shaved their beards to avoid harassment from the security services, who tend to associate wearing beards with advocacy of politically motivated Islam. In the late 1980s, Qadhafi began to pursue a domestic policy directed against Islamic fundamentalists; September 11 has reinforced his view that fundamentalism is a potential rallying point for opponents of the regime.

There continue to be reports of armed clashes between security forces and Islamic groups that oppose the current regime and advocate the establishment of a more traditional form of Islamic government.

There are currently no reports available on the number or status of individuals detained because of their religious beliefs.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

A non-Libyan woman who marries a Muslim Libyan man is not required to convert to Islam, although many do so; however, a non-Libyan man must convert into order to marry a Muslim Libyan woman.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Information on religious freedom is limited, although members of non-Muslim minority religions report that they do not face harassment by authorities or the Muslim majority on the basis of their religious practices.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The United States has no official presence in the country and maintains no bilateral dialog with the Government on religious freedom issues.

MOROCCO

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however there were some restrictions. The Constitution provides that Islam is the official state religion; however, non-Muslim communities openly practice their faith.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government places certain restrictions on Christian religious materials and proselytizing, and several small religious minorities are tolerated with varying degrees of official restrictions. The Government monitors the activities of mosques and places other restrictions on Muslims and Islamic organizations whose activities are deemed to have exceeded the bounds of religious practice and become political in nature.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, converts to Christianity generally face social ostracism.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total land area of approximately 172,320 square miles, and its population is 31,167,783. An estimated 99 percent of citizens are Sunni Muslims. The Jewish community numbers approximately 5,000 persons and resides predominantly in the Casablanca and Rabat urban areas, as well as some smaller cities throughout the country. The foreign Christian community (Roman Catholic and Protestant) consists of 5,000 practicing members, although estimates of Christians residing in the country at any particular time range up to 25,000. Most reside in the Casablanca and Rabat urban areas. Also located in Rabat and Casablanca, the Baha'i community numbers 350 to 400 persons.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides that Islam is the official religion, and designates the King as "Commander of the Faithful" with the responsibility of ensuring "respect for Islam." The Constitution also provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government places certain restrictions on Christian religious materials and proselytizing, and several small religious minorities are tolerated with varying degrees of official restrictions. The Government monitors the activities of mosques and places other restrictions on Muslims and Islamic organizations whose activities are deemed to have exceeded the bounds of religious practice and become political in nature. Christian and Jewish communities openly practice their faiths. A small foreign Hindu community may perform cremations and hold services. In the past, Baha'is reportedly have been forbidden to meet or participate in communal activities; how-

ever, there were no reports that their activities were restricted during the period covered by this report.

The Government does not license or approve religions or religious organizations. The Government provides tax benefits, land and building grants, subsidies, and customs exemptions for imports necessary for the observance of the major religions.

The teaching of Islam in public schools is funded in the Government's annual education budget, as are other curriculum subjects. The annual budget also funds religious instruction in Jewish public schools. The Government has funded several efforts to study the cultural, artistic, literary, and scientific heritage of Jewish citizens, including creating a chair for the study of comparative religions including the study of Latin and Hebrew at the University of Rabat. In 2000 the King declared that 100 mosques throughout the country would be used as teaching centers to fight illiteracy. The King designated 200 unemployed university graduates to administer the literacy courses on Islam civic education and hygiene to 10,000 citizens between the ages of 15 and 45 during the program's pilot stages, which began in 2000. According to the Ministry of Habbos and Islamic Affairs, since the project began, approximately 43,000 citizens have received training. During the period covered by this report, the King proposed increasing the number of teachers and providing vocational training for the teachers.

The Government continues to encourage tolerance and respect among religions. In March 2002, the Government invited Israel to attend the International Parliamentary Union meeting in Marrakech, although there were protests against this decision because of the deteriorating situation in the West Bank. During the King's April 2002 visit to the U.S., he met with prominent Jewish figures and with leaders of the Conference of Presidents of the major American Jewish organizations. During this meeting, the King invited participants to visit the country.

The Government organizes an annual event called the "Fez Festival of Sacred Music," which includes musicians who represent many religions. This was the first year that the festival branched beyond Islam, Christianity, and Judaism to include Native American, Hindu, and Buddhist spiritual traditions. In the past, the Government has organized numerous symposia among local and international clergy, priests, rabbis, imams, and other spiritual leaders to examine ways to reduce religious intolerance and to promote interfaith dialog. During the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, the King hosts a colloquia of Islamic religious scholars that, among other issues, examine ways to promote tolerance and mutual respect within Islam and between Islam and other religions.

The King personally ordered an interfaith ceremony to be held at the Catholic cathedral in Rabat in honor of the victims of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States. The ceremony, attended by the Prime Minister and most of his cabinet, featured Muslim, Christian, and Jewish religious speakers.

The following religious holidays are considered national holidays: Eid al Adha, Islamic New Year, the Prophet Mohammed's Birthday, and Eid al Fitr.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs monitors Friday mosque sermons and the Koranic schools to ensure the teaching of approved doctrine. At times the authorities suppress the activities of Islamists but generally tolerate activities limited to the propagation of Islam, education, and charity. Security forces commonly close mosques to the public shortly after Friday services to prevent use of the premises for unauthorized political activity. The Government strictly controls authorization to construct new mosques. Most mosques are constructed using private funds.

The Government bars the Islamic Justice and Charity Organization (JCO), which does not recognize the King's spiritual authority, as a political party and continued to block the publication of JCO newspapers and websites.

Any attempt to induce a Muslim to convert is illegal. According to Article 220 of the Penal Code, any attempt to stop one or more persons from the exercise of their religious beliefs, or attendance at religious services, is unlawful and may be punished by 3 to 6 months' imprisonment and a fine of \$10 to \$50 (115 to 575 dirhams). The Article applies the same penalty to "anyone who employs incitements in order to shake the faith of a Muslim or to convert him to another religion." Foreign missionaries either limit their proselytizing to non-Muslims or conduct their work quietly. The Government cited the prohibition on conversion in the Penal Code in most cases in which courts expelled foreign missionaries. In February the Government used this provision to prosecute 14 teenagers who listened to heavy metal and hard rock music and who embraced elements of an international lifestyle associated with that music which the prosecution characterized as un-Islamic. The cases were thrown out on appeal in April, and society widely condemned the prosecutions for overstepping the bounds of religious concerns.

Citizens who convert to Christianity and other religions generally face social ostracism, and a small number of persons have faced short periods of questioning or detention by the authorities. Voluntary conversion is not a crime under the Criminal or Civil Codes; however, until 4 years ago, the authorities had jailed some converts on the basis of references to Islamic law. Christian citizens sometimes still are called in for questioning by the authorities.

A small foreign Christian community operates churches, orphanages, hospitals, and schools without any government restrictions or licensing requirements. Missionaries who conduct themselves in accordance with societal expectations largely are left unhindered; however, those whose activities become public face expulsion. Although no expulsions have occurred since 1998, some missionaries have been called in for questioning by authorities, or have not been granted a “temporary residence permit” enabling them to remain in the country on a long-term basis.

The Government permits the display and sale of Bibles in French, English, and Spanish, but confiscates Arabic-language Bibles and refuses licenses for their importation and sale, despite the absence of any law banning such books. Nevertheless Arabic Bibles have been sold in local bookstores.

Since 1983 the small Baha’i community has been forbidden to meet or participate in communal activities; however, there were no reports that the Ministry of the Interior summoned Baha’is for questioning or denied them passports, as had occurred in past years.

There are two sets of laws and courts—one for Jews and one for Muslims—pertaining to marriage, inheritance, and family matters. The family law courts are run, depending on the law that applies, by rabbinical and Islamic authorities who are court officials. Parliament authorizes any changes to those laws. Non-Koranic sections of Muslim law on personal status are applicable to non-Muslim and non-Jewish persons.

Women suffer various forms of legal and cultural discrimination, in part because of the codification of Islamic tenets in criminal and civil law.

The civil-law status of women is governed by the Code of Personal Status (sometimes referred to as the “Moudawana”) which is based on the Maliki school of Islamic law. Women’s groups still complain of unequal treatment, particularly under the laws governing marriage, divorce, and inheritance, despite 1993 reforms to the Code of Personal Status. To marry, a woman generally is required to obtain the permission of her legal guardian, usually her father. Only in rare circumstances may she act on her own behalf as her own guardian. It is far easier for men to obtain divorces than for women. Under Islamic law and tradition, rather than asking for a divorce, a man simply may repudiate his wife outside of court. Under the 1993 personal status, a woman’s presence in court is required for her husband to divorce her, although women’s groups report that this law is frequently ignored. While there are reports that some officials refuse to order a divorce without the wife being present, despite offers of bribes, women’s groups complain that men resort to ruses to evade the legal restrictions. The divorce may be finalized even over the woman’s objections, although in such cases the court grants her unspecified allowance rights.

A woman seeking a divorce has few practical alternatives. She may offer her husband money to agree to a divorce (known as a *khol’a* divorce). The husband must agree to the divorce and is allowed to specify the amount to be paid, without limit. According to women’s groups, many men pressure their wives to pursue this kind of divorce. A woman also may file for a judicial divorce if her husband takes a second wife, if he abandons her, or if he physically abuses her; however, divorce procedures in these cases are lengthy and complicated. In 1998 the Minister of Islamic Affairs proposed additions to the basic marriage contract that would outline the rights and duties agreed upon between husband and wife and permit legal recourse for the enforcement of the contract.

Under the Criminal Code, women generally are accorded the same treatment as men, but this is not the case for family and estate law, which is based on the Code of Personal Status. Under the Code of Personal Status, women inherit only half as much as male heirs. Moreover, even in cases in which the law provides for equal status, cultural norms often prevent a woman from exercising those rights. For example, when a woman inherits property, male relatives may pressure her to relinquish her interest.

In March 2001, the Government created a new commission for reforming the Personal Status Code, and the King publicly urged the Commission to work on proposals to improve the application of existing laws and on a longer term “substantial reform” of the code. Islamists and some other traditional segments of society firmly opposed the King’s proposal, especially with respect to its more controversial elements, such as reform of women’s legal status in marriage and family law issues. In 2001 a number of women’s groups formed a coalition called the “Spring of Equal-

ity” to protest the lack of progress in reforming the Personal Status Code. The “Spring of Equality” continued to protest the lack of progress throughout 2002. In December 2002, the chairman of the Moudawana Advisory Commission, Supreme Court President Driss Dahak, announced that the Commission would not be able to complete its work by the end of the year, as originally planned. On January 23, the King replaced Dahak as chairman with Mohamed Boucetta, a former Foreign Minister.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Islamist dissident Sheikh Abdessalam Yassine, who spent 11 years under house arrest for refusing to acknowledge the religious authority of the King, continued to preside openly over the JCO. Members of the JCO remain subject to constant surveillance. The JCO continues to maintain an active presence on university campuses; however the Government monitors Islamist campus activities.

The Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH) claims that 2 members of the “Group of 26,” an Islamist group involved in smuggling arms into the country from Algeria in the mid-1980s, remain in prison. The other 24 members completed their sentences or otherwise have been released.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, converts to Christianity generally face social ostracism. Foreigners attend religious services without any restrictions or fear of reprisals, and Jews live throughout the country in safety. While free expression of Islamic faith and free academic and theological discussion of non-Islamic religions are accepted on television and radio, society discourages public efforts to proselytize. Most citizens view such public acts as provocative threats to law and order in an overwhelmingly Muslim country. In addition society expects public respect for the institutions and mores of Islam, although private behavior and beliefs are unregulated and unmonitored. Because many Muslims view the Baha’i Faith as a heretical offshoot of Islam, most members of the tiny Baha’i community maintain a low religious profile; however, Baha’is live freely and without fear for their persons or property, and some even hold government jobs.

There is widespread consensus among Muslims regarding religious practices and interpretation. Other sources of popular consensus are the councils of ulemas, unofficial religious scholars who serve as monitors of the monarchy and the actions of the Government. Because the ulemas traditionally hold the power to legitimize or delegitimize kings through their moral authority, government policies closely adhere to popular and religious expectations. While dissenters such as Sheikh Yassine and his followers challenge the religious authority of the King and call for the establishment of a government more deeply rooted in their vision of Islam, the majority of citizens do not appear to share their views.

The anxiety of Jewish citizens has increased as the situation in the Middle East has deteriorated during 2002. In May 2002, Imam Zamzami, who is affiliated with the Party of Justice and Development (PJD, the officially recognized Islamist party), made openly anti-Semitic remarks. The press criticized him severely for not differentiating between Jews who supported Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians and those who did not. In early 2002, the police increased the security at synagogues and Jewish community facilities.

On May 16, five terrorist bombings killed 44 people, including 12 suicide attackers, in Casablanca. Locations associated with Jewish people may have been deliberate targets, although no Jews were killed. King Mohammed VI visited the bombing sites and victims in hospitals. On May 25, Muslims and Jews marched in a large demonstration in Casablanca against terrorism, with both Muslims and Jews marching together. On May 18, near Essaouira, a number of Jews celebrated a rabbi buried there almost 160 years ago, and the governor of Essaouira attended some of the ceremonies. Other annual Jewish commemorations took place around the country normally.

There were no incidents of religious intolerance in the media or in school textbooks during the period covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. U.S. Embassy officials encountered no interference from the Government in making contacts with members of the JCO.

U.S. Embassy officials also meet regularly with religious officials, including the Minister of Islamic Affairs, Islamic religious scholars, leaders of the Jewish community, and Christian missionaries. Embassy officials also established contact with local Christians during the period covered by this report.

OMAN

The Constitution or Basic Charter protects the freedom to practice religious rites, in accordance with tradition, provided that their practices do not breach public order, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however there were some restrictions. The Basic Charter also declares that Islam is the State religion and that Shari'a is the source of all legislation. The Government permits worship by non-Muslim residents; however, non-Muslim religious organizations must be registered with the Government, and the Government restricts some of their activities.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Christian and Hindu worship is permitted, and Sultan Qaboos has given land for the construction of centers of worship for these religions. It is illegal for non-Muslims to proselytize Muslims.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country's total area is 82,031 square miles, and its population is approximately 2.8 million, of whom 1,889,910 are Omani. Most citizens are Ibadhi or Sunni Muslims, but there also is a minority of Shi'a Muslims. There is a small community of ethnically Indian Hindu citizens and reportedly a very small number of Christian citizens, who came from India or the Levant and who have been naturalized.

The majority of non-Muslims are noncitizen immigrant workers from South Asia. There are a number of Christian denominations represented in the country.

While there is no information regarding missionary groups in the country, several nonproselytizing faith-based organizations operate. Clergy of the Anglican Church, the Reformed Church of America, and other Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox groups are present in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution or Basic Charter protects the freedom to practice religious rites, in accordance with tradition, provided that their practices do not breach public order, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there were some restrictions. The Basic Charter also declares that Islam is the State religion and that Shari'a is the source of all legislation. Within these parameters, the Government permits freedom of worship for non-Muslims. The Charter prohibits discrimination against individuals on the basis of religion or religious group. Some non-Muslims worship at churches and temples built on land donated by the Sultan, including two Catholic and two Protestant church complexes. Hindu temples also have been built on government-provided land. In addition the Government provided land for Catholic and Protestant churches in Sohar and Salalah. Non-Muslim religious organizations must be registered with the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, and the Government restricts some of their activities. The criterion for registration is opaque. One non-Muslim organization present in the country for several decades has had its application for formal registration pending at the Ministry for several years. Anecdotal evidence suggest that visiting non-Muslim organizations are permitted to operate within legal boundaries if a registered entity agrees to sponsor them with the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

Citizen children must attend schools that provide instruction in Islam; noncitizen children may attend schools that do not offer instruction in Islam.

The Government has sponsored forums at which differing interpretations of Islam have been examined, and inter-faith, government-sponsored dialog takes place on a regular basis.

The following religious holidays are considered national holidays: Eid al Adha, Islamic (Hijra) New Year, Birth of the Prophet, Ascension Day, Eid al Fitr.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Citizens and noncitizen residents are free to discuss their religious beliefs; however, the Government prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing Muslims. Under Islamic law, a Muslim who recants belief in Islam would be considered an apostate and dealt with under applicable Islamic legal procedure. Non-Muslims are permitted to change their religious affiliation to Islam and proselytizing non-Muslims by Muslims is allowed. The authorities reportedly have asked members of the Baha'i community not to proselytize, in accordance with the country's law and custom.

The Government prohibits non-Muslim groups from publishing religious material, although non-Muslim religious material printed abroad may be brought into the country. Members of all religions and religious groups are free to maintain links with coreligionists abroad and to undertake foreign travel for religious purposes. Ministers and priests from abroad also are permitted to visit the country for the purpose of carrying out duties related to registered religious organizations.

The Government expects all imams to preach sermons within the parameters of standardized texts distributed monthly by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. The Government monitors sermons at mosques to ensure that the imams do not discuss political topics and stay within the state-approved orthodoxy of Islam.

Some aspects of Islamic law and tradition as interpreted in the country discriminate against women. Shari'a favors male heirs in adjudicating inheritance claims. While there is continuing reluctance to take an inheritance dispute to court for fear of alienating the family, women increasingly are aware of and taking steps to protect and exercise their rights as citizens.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Religious discrimination in the private sector largely is absent. Christian theologians have met with local Islamic authorities and with members of the faculty at the country's major university. Private groups that promote interfaith dialog are permitted to exist as long as discussions do not constitute an attempt to cause Muslims to recant their Islamic beliefs.

In 2001, the Sultan invited Islamic leaders from many countries and all major branches and schools of Islam to the opening of the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. Members of the staff at the U.S. Embassy freely participate in local religious ceremonies and have contact with members of non-Muslim religious groups.

QATAR

The Constitution provides for freedom of worship in accordance with the law and the requirements of protecting the public system and public behavior; however, the Government continues to prohibit proselytization by non-Muslims and places some restrictions on public worship. The official state religion follows the conservative Wahhabi tradition of the Hanbali school of Islam.

The status of respect for religious freedom improved somewhat during the period covered by this report due to the adoption of a Constitution that explicitly provides for freedom of worship; the establishment of diplomatic relations between the country and the Vatican; and the conduct of a dialog on Muslim-Christian understanding. The Government has given legal status to many Christian churches, allowing them to open banking accounts and sponsor clergy for visas. Non-Muslims

may not proselytize, and the Government formally prohibits the publication, importation, and distribution of non-Islamic religious books and materials; however, in practice individuals generally are not prevented from importing Bibles and other religious items for personal use. There are no Shi'a employed in senior national security positions.

There are generally amicable relations among persons of differing religious beliefs.

The U.S. Government discussed religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total land area of approximately 4,254 square miles and its population is estimated at approximately 600,000 of whom approximately 150,000 are believed to be citizens. The majority of the 450,000 non-citizens are Sunni Muslims, mostly from other Arab countries working on temporary employment contracts, and their accompanying family members. The remaining foreigners include Shi'a Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Baha'is. Most foreign workers and their families live near the major employment centers of Doha, Ras Laffan/Al Khor, Messaeed, and Dukhan.

The Christian community is a diverse mix of Indians, Filipinos, Europeans, Arabs, and Americans. It includes Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and other Protestant denominations. The Hindu community is almost exclusively Indian, while Buddhists include South and East Asians. Most Baha'is come from Iran. Both citizens and foreigners attend a small number of Shi'a mosques.

No foreign missionary groups operate openly in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of worship in accordance with the law and the requirements of protecting the public system and public behavior; however, the Government continues to prohibit proselytization by non-Muslims and places some restrictions on public worship. The state religion is Islam, as interpreted by the conservative Wahabi order of the Sunni branch. While Shi'a practice most aspects of their faith freely, they may not organize traditional Shi'a ceremonies or perform rites such as self-flagellation.

The Government and ruling family are linked inextricably to Islam. The Minister of Islamic Affairs controls the construction of mosques, clerical affairs, and Islamic education for adults and new converts. The Amir participates in public prayers during both Eid holiday periods and personally finances the Hajj journeys of poor pilgrims who cannot afford to travel to Mecca.

The Government has given legal status to Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox, Coptic, and many Asian Christian denominations; however, the Government does not allow the building of new non-Muslim public places of worship without permission. In May it provided them with registration numbers that will allow them to open bank accounts and sponsor clergy for visas. During the period covered by this report, Christian church officials continued to seek authorization to construct churches on land reserved by the Government for Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox, Coptic, and other Christian communities; however, the Government has not issued building permits. The Government does not maintain an official approved register of religious congregations.

During the period covered by this report, the Government established diplomatic relations with the Vatican. The Government also hosted a seminar on Christian-Muslim understanding, which drew 30 prominent scholars including the Archbishop of Canterbury to the capitol in April.

The following religious holidays are considered national holidays: Islamic New Year, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Constitution provides for freedom of worship in accordance with the law and the requirements of protecting the public system and public behavior; however, the Government continues to prohibit proselytization by non-Muslims and places some restrictions on public worship.

Converting to another religion from Islam is considered apostasy and is technically a capital offense; however, since 1971 there is no record of an execution for such a crime.

The Government formally prohibits the publication, importation, and distribution of non-Islamic religious literature; however, in practice individuals generally are not

prevented from importing Bibles and other religious items for personal use. In addition, religious materials for use at Christmas and Easter are available readily in local shops.

Some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have raised concerns that the Government has deported several non-Muslims because of their religious activities. Though the Government does not normally provide official explanations of such cases, proselytization is often the suspected cause.

Congregations coordinate the holding of large religious services with the Government in advance, while smaller services are held without prior authorization. Although traffic police may direct cars at these services, the congregations may not publicly advertise them in advance or use visible religious symbols such as outdoor crosses. Some services, particularly those on Easter and Christmas, can draw more than 1,300 worshippers.

The Government does not permit Hindus, Buddhists, Baha'is, or members of other religions to operate as freely as Christian congregations; however, there is no official effort to harass or hamper adherents of these faiths in the private practice of their religion.

Discrimination in the areas of employment, education, housing, and health services do occur, but nationality is usually a more important determinant than religion. For example, Muslims hold nearly all high-ranking government positions because they are reserved for citizens. However, while Shi'a are well represented in the bureaucracy and business community, there are no Shi'as employed in senior national security positions.

Islamic instruction is compulsory in public schools. While there are no restrictions on non-Muslims providing private religious instruction for children, most foreign children attend secular private schools.

Both Muslim and non-Muslim litigants may request the Shari'a courts to assume jurisdiction in commercial or civil cases. Convicted Muslims may earn points for good behavior and have their sentences reduced by a few months by memorizing the Koran.

Shari'a law imposes significant restrictions on Muslim women. The Government adheres to Shari'a as practiced in the country in matters of inheritance and child custody. Muslim wives have the right to inherit from their husbands; however, they inherit only one-half as much as male relatives. Non-Muslim wives inherit nothing, unless a special exception is arranged. In cases of divorce, Shari'a is followed; younger children remain with the mother and older children with the father. Both parents retain permanent rights of visitation. However, local authorities do not allow a noncitizen parent to take his or her child out of the country without permission of the citizen parent. Women may attend court proceedings but generally are represented by a male relative; however, women may represent themselves. According to Shari'a, the testimony of two women equals that of one man, but the courts routinely interpret this on a case-by-case basis. A non-Muslim woman is not required to convert to Islam upon marriage to a Muslim; however, many make a personal decision to do so. A noncitizen woman is not required to become a citizen upon marriage to a citizen. Children born to a Muslim father are considered to be Muslim.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between persons of differing religious beliefs generally are amicable and tolerant. The press and media generally treat non-Muslim religions in a respectful manner. On a few occasions, privately owned newspapers or public television stations have carried articles or sermons with anti-Semitic or anti-Christian content.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The Ambassador and other Embassy officials met with Government officials at all levels to address religious freedom issues. The Embassy facilitated contacts between religious leaders and the Government, and coordinated initiatives with other Embassies to increase their impact.

The Ambassador and other Embassy officials also met with representatives from a number of religious communities in the country. The Embassy discussed with them strategies for increasing religious freedom in the country, protection of the in-

terests of minority congregations, and allegations of discrimination on religious grounds, and has brought these issues to the attention of appropriate officials in the Government.

SAUDI ARABIA

The country is ruled by a monarchy with a legal system based on Islamic law (Shari'a). The Government does not provide legal protection for freedom of religion, and such protection does not exist in practice. Islam is the official religion, and the law requires that all citizens be Muslims. The Government prohibits the public practice of non-Muslim religions. The Government recognizes the right of non-Muslims to worship in private; however, it does not always respect this right in practice, and does not define this right in law.

There generally was no change in the status of religious freedom during the period covered by this report, although the Government initiated a limited campaign to foster greater moderation and tolerance of religious diversity. The Government enforces a strictly conservative version of Sunni Islam. Muslims who do not adhere to the officially sanctioned Salafi (commonly called "Wahhabi") tradition can face severe repercussions at the hands of the Mutawwa'in (religious police). The Government continued to detain Shi'a religious leaders and members of the Ismaili Shi'a community in Najran province. Members of the Shi'a minority continue to face political and economic discrimination, including limited employment opportunities, little representation in official institutions, and restrictions on the practice of their faith and on the building of mosques and community centers. The Government has stated publicly that its policy is to allow non-Muslims to worship privately; however, this policy is not consistently enforced, resulting in the violation of some non-Muslims' freedom of worship and causing other non-Muslims to worship in fear of harassment and in such a manner as to avoid discovery.

During the period covered by this report, senior Government officials have made some efforts to improve the climate of tolerance toward other religions and within Islam. The Government convened a "National Dialog" meeting between members of different Muslim traditions, and issued statements condemning incitements to violence and the disparagement of other religions. The Grand Mufti issued a fatwa (religious ruling) denouncing incitement to violence and the disparagement of other religions. The Government also took measures to remove disparaging references to other religious traditions from the educational curriculum. In addition, increased press freedom permitted journalists to publicly criticize abuses by the religious police. However, there continued to be religious discrimination and sectarian tension in society during the period covered by this report, including ongoing denunciations of non-Muslim religions from government sanctioned pulpits.

The majority of citizens supports a state based on Islamic law, and many oppose public non-Muslim worship, although there are differing views as to how this should be realized in practice. There is societal discrimination against members of the Shi'a minority.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. Senior administration officials have continued to raise U.S. concerns with the Government.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 756,981 square miles and its population is approximately 24 million, with an estimated foreign population of 6-7 million. The foreign population includes approximately 1.4 million Indians, 1 million Bangladeshis, nearly 900,000 Pakistanis, 800,000 Filipinos, 750,000 Egyptians, 250,000 Palestinians, 150,000 Lebanese, 130,000 Sri Lankans, 40,000 Eritreans, and 36,000 Americans. Comprehensive statistics for the religious denominations of foreigners are not available; however, they include Muslims from the various branches and schools of Islam, Christians, and Hindus. Approximately 90 percent of the Filipino community is Christian. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops estimates there are well over 500,000 Catholics in the country, and perhaps as many as 1 million.

The majority of citizens are Sunni Muslims predominantly adhering to the strict interpretation of Islam taught by the Salafi or Wahhabi school that is the official state religion.

Approximately 2 million citizens are Shi'a Muslims, the majority of whom live in the eastern province, where they constitute approximately one-half of the population.

There is no information regarding foreign missionaries in the country. Proselytization by non-Sunni Muslims is not permitted.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Freedom of religion does not exist. Islam is the official religion, and all citizens must be Muslims. The Government limits the practice of all but the officially sanctioned version of Islam and prohibits the public practice of other religions. During the period covered by this report, the Government publicly restated its policy that non-Muslims are free to practice their religions at home and in private. While the Government does not always respect this right in practice, many non-Muslims engage in private worship without harassment. As custodian of Islam's two holiest sites in Mecca and Medina, the Government considers its legitimacy to rest largely on its interpretation and enforcement of Shari'a. Consequently, the Government has declared the Koran and the Sunna (tradition) of Muhammed to be the country's Constitution. The Government follows the rigorously conservative and strict interpretation of the Salafi (often referred to as "Wahhabi") school of the Sunni branch of Islam and discriminates against other branches of Islam. The Government limits the practice of all but the officially sanctioned version of Islam, and prohibits the public practice of other religions. Neither the Government nor society in general accepts the concept of separation of religion and state, and such separation does not exist.

The country is governed according to the Basic Law, which sets out the system of government, rights of residents and citizens, and powers and duties of the Government. The judiciary bases its judgments largely on Shari'a, a code derived from the Holy Koran and the Sunna. The Government permits Shi'a Muslims to use their own legal tradition to adjudicate cases limited to family law, inheritance, and endowment management. However, there are only two such judges, one in Qatif and one in al Hasa, which is insufficient to serve the sizable Shi'a populations of those areas and the rest of the country.

The 'Eid al-Fitr and 'Eid al-Adha religious holidays are recognized as the only national holidays. Observance of the Shi'a holiday of Ashura is allowed in the eastern city of Qatif and in the southern province of Najran, but public observances continue to be prohibited elsewhere.

Hindus are considered polytheists by Islamic law, which is used as a justification for greater discrimination in calculating accidental death or injury compensation. According to the country's "Hanbali" interpretation of Sharia (Islamic law), once fault is determined by a court, a Muslim male receives 100 percent of the amount of compensation determined, a male Jew or Christian receives 50 percent, and all others (including Hindus and Sikhs) receive $\frac{1}{16}$ of the amount a male Muslim receives.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Tolerated Islamic practice generally is limited to a school of the Sunni branch of Islam as interpreted by Muhammed Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab, an 18th century Arab religious reformer. (This branch of Islam is often referred to as "Wahhabi," a term that many adherents to this tradition do not use. The teachings of the reformer Abd Al-Wahhab are more often referred to by adherents as "Salafi" or "Muwahiddun," that is, following the forefathers of Islam, or unifiers of Islamic practice.) Practices contrary to this interpretation, such as celebration of the Prophet Muhammed's birthday and visits to the tombs of renowned Muslims, are discouraged. The Government prohibits the spreading of Muslim teachings that do not conform to the officially accepted interpretation of Islam. During the period covered by this report, there was a greater degree of public discussion of the conservative religious traditions than previously seen. Particularly after the May 12 terror attacks in Riyadh, some citizen writers began to criticize abuses committed by the religious police (the Committee to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice, commonly called the "Mutawwa'in"). However, discussion of religious issues is severely constrained, and the editor of a major local daily newspaper was fired from his position after he allowed the publication of a series of articles and cartoons critical of the religious establishment.

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs supervises and finances the construction and maintenance of almost all mosques in the country, although approximately 30 percent of all mosques in the country are built and endowed by private persons for charity or at private palaces. However, all mosques fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. The Ministry pays the salaries of imams (prayer leaders) and others who work in the mosques. The Committee to Promote Virtue and Pre-

vent Vice is a governmental entity, whose chairman has ministerial status. A separate government committee defines the qualifications of imams.

Since the May terrorist attacks in Riyadh, the Government has taken public measures to control religious extremism. It announced the firing of hundreds of Imams for immoderate preaching, and said that over 1,000 more had been called in for retraining and “guidance.” The Government also announced a training course for Mutawwa’in in interpersonal relations.

The Government bars foreign imams from leading worship during the most heavily attended prayer times and prohibits them from delivering sermons during Friday congregational prayers. The Government states that its actions are part of its “Saudization” plan to replace foreign workers with citizens.

Under Shari’a, conversion by a Muslim to another religion is considered apostasy, a crime punishable by death if the accused does not recant. There were no executions for apostasy during the period covered by this report, and there have been no reports of such executions for the past several years. There was a report of a citizen who had converted to Christianity and was convicted of blasphemy.

The Government prohibits public non-Muslim religious activities. Non-Muslim worshippers risk arrest, imprisonment, lashing, deportation, and sometimes torture for engaging in religious activity that attracts official attention. The Government has stated publicly, including before the UN Committee on Human Rights (UNCHR) in Geneva, that its policy is to allow non-Muslim foreigners to worship privately. However, the Government does not provide explicit guidelines—such as the number of persons permitted to attend and acceptable locations—for determining what constitutes private worship, which makes distinctions between public and private worship unclear. Such lack of clarity and instances of inconsistent enforcement led many non-Muslims to worship in fear of harassment and in such a way as to avoid discovery. The Government almost always deports those detained for visible non-Muslim worship after sometimes lengthy periods of arrest during investigation. In some cases, they also are sentenced to receive lashes prior to deportation.

The Government does not officially permit non-Muslim clergy to enter the country for the purpose of conducting religious services, although some come under other auspices and the Government generally has allowed their performance of discreet religious functions. Such restrictions make it very difficult for most non-Muslims to maintain contact with clergymen and attend services. Catholics and Orthodox Christians, who require a priest on a regular basis to receive the sacraments required by their faith, particularly are affected.

Proselytizing by non-Muslims, including the distribution of non-Muslim religious materials such as Bibles, is illegal. Muslims or non-Muslims wearing religious symbols of any kind in public risk confrontation with the Mutawwa’in. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs sponsors approximately 50 so-called “Call and Guidance” centers employing approximately 500 persons to convert foreigners to Islam. Some non-Muslim foreigners convert to Islam during their stay in the country. The press often carries articles about such conversions, including testimonials.

The Government requires noncitizens to carry Iqamas, or legal resident identity cards, which contain a religious designation for “Muslim” or “non-Muslim.” There have been reports that individual Mutawwa’in have pressured Saudi sponsors not to renew Iqamas, which had been issued for employment, of individuals for religious reasons.

Members of the Shi’a minority are the subjects of officially sanctioned political and economic discrimination. During the period covered by this report, authorities permitted a greater degree of freedom to Shi’ites in the Eastern Province city of Qatif than in the past, overlooking religious practices and gatherings that were previously prevented. There were no reports of meeting places being closed down. In other areas with large Shi’a populations, however, such as al-Hasa and Dammam, there continue to be restrictions on Shi’a religious practices. The authorities permit the celebration of the Shi’a holiday of Ashura in Qatif, provided that the celebrants do not undertake large, public marches or engage in self-flagellation (a practice of some Shi’a). The police, as with any public gathering in the country, monitor the Ashura observances. In March observance of Ashura took place in Qatif without incident, including a sermon given by a prominent Shi’a cleric who preached to a gathering of 10,000. No other Ashura celebrations are permitted in the country, and many Shi’a travel to Qatif or to Bahrain to participate in Ashura celebrations. The Government continued sporadically to enforce other restrictions on the Shi’a community, such as banning Shi’a books and excluding Shi’a perspectives from the extensive religious media and broadcast programming.

Shi’a have declined government offers to build state-supported mosques because they fear the Government would prohibit the incorporation and display of Shi’a motifs in any such mosques. The Government seldom permits private construction of

Shi'a mosques. In the past, the Government has closed Shi'a mosques built without government permission.

Members of the Shi'a minority are discriminated against in government employment, especially in national security-related positions, such as the military or Ministry of the Interior. There is an absence of Shi'a representatives at management levels in most of the country's largest government agencies and private companies. The Government restricts employment of Shi'a in the oil and petrochemical industries. The Government also discriminates against Shi'a in higher education through unofficial restrictions on the number of Shi'a admitted to universities. There are no Shi'a principals in the approximately 300 female schools in the Eastern Province. There are no Shi'a cabinet ministers, and only 2 Shi'a in the 120 member Majlis al-Shura (consultative council). There are no Shi'a members of the country's highest religious authority, the Council of Senior Islamic Scholars (Ulema).

Since 2001, the Government has allowed Shi'a citizens to travel freely to Iran for religious pilgrimages. Advance permission for travel to Iraq, whether for business or religious pilgrimage, has been necessary for some time due to security concerns, but such travel remains possible.

Under the provisions of Shari'a law as practiced in the country, judges may discount the testimony of people who are not practicing Muslims or who do not adhere to the official interpretation of Islam. Legal sources report that testimony by Shi'a is often ignored in courts of law or is deemed to have less weight than testimony by Sunnis. For example, in 2001 a judge in the eastern province ruled that the testimony of two Shi'a witnesses to an automobile accident was inadmissible. Sentencing under the legal system is not uniform. However, laws and regulations state that defendants should be treated equally.

Customs officials routinely open mail and shipments to search for contraband, including Sunni printed material that is deemed incompatible with the Salafi tradition of Islam, Shi'a religious materials, and non-Muslim materials, such as Bibles and religious videotapes. Such materials are subject to confiscation, although rules appear to be applied arbitrarily.

Sunni Islamic religious education is mandatory in public schools at all levels. Regardless of which Islamic tradition their families adhere to, all public school children receive religious instruction that conforms to the Salafi tradition of Islam. Non-Muslim students in private schools are not required to study Islam. Private religious schools are not permitted for non-Muslims, or for Muslims adhering to non-Salafi traditions of Islam. Shi'a are banned from teaching religion in schools.

Public debate over reform in the country increased during the period covered by this report. In January a group of intellectuals presented a petition to Crown Prince Abdullah calling for political, economic and social reform, including freedom of expression. In April a group of 450 Shi'ites presented a petition to the Crown Prince calling for political and economic reform, and an end to discrimination against Shi'ites and other Muslim sects. Following the May terrorist attacks in Riyadh, a speech was delivered on behalf of the King to the Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Council) outlining a program of reform and calling for moderation and tolerance. And in June, the Government sponsored a "National Intellectual Dialog" among leaders of different Islamic traditions that resulted in a statement acknowledging theological diversity within Islam. Nevertheless, despite positive statements, there has, thus far, been little tangible improvement in the status of those who do not adhere to the state-sanctioned version of Islam or who belong to a minority religious group.

During the period covered by this report, the Government permitted independent human rights monitors to visit the country for the first time. In October, a United Nations Special Rapporteur visited the country to review the country's legal system. In January Human Rights Watch visited the country for several weeks and met with government officials including the Ministers of Justice and Foreign Affairs, and the President of the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. The Government also gave formal authority over human rights issues to the Shura Council's Islamic Affairs Committee.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, the Government continued to commit abuses of religious freedom. However, reports of abuses are often difficult or impossible to corroborate for a variety of reasons. Fear and consequent secrecy surrounding any non-Muslim religious activity contribute to reluctance to disclose any information that might harm persons under government investigation. Moreover, information regarding government practices is incomplete because judicial proceedings have been closed to the public, although the 2002 Criminal Procedural Law allows some court proceedings to be open to the public.

While there has been an improvement in press freedom during the period covered by this report, open discussion of religious issues remains severely constrained. After the May terror attacks, several national newspapers published cartoons, editorials and articles critical of the Mutawwa'in and religious establishment. This prompted much criticism from the religious establishment, and some religious conservatives advocated a boycott of al-Watan, one of the more vocal newspapers in this discussion. After an editorial appeared questioning the teachings of the 14th Century Hanbali scholar Ibn Taymiyya, al-Watan's Editor-in-Chief was fired from his post. There was also a report that a university professor was fired for criticizing the Government's discriminatory policies against Shi'a.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reported arrests of Shi'a religious leaders for religious violations and all of the Ismaili prisoners arrested during the 2000 Najran civil disturbances received pardons in 2002, halving their sentences. Many of the prisoners with shorter sentences were released, including Hajj Mohammed al-Saadi, a 65-year-old Ismaili shaykh.

According to various reports, a number of Shi'a remained in detention during the period covered by this report, and there were reports of religious prisoners who were subjected to torture. Shaykh Ali bin Ali al-Ghanim was released from prison in 2002 after 20 months imprisonment. There continue to be reports of young Shi'a being detained for days or weeks. Charges are rarely filed, and family members are not notified where the young men are held. In January 2002, Sheikh Ahmed Turki al-Saab was arrested 1 week after the U.S. newspaper *The Wall Street Journal* published his comments that were critical of the Government's policies toward the Shi'a minority. In April 2002, he was sentenced to flogging and 7 years in prison.

The Government continued to detain and deport non-Muslims engaged in worship services. Early in 2002, eleven Christian detainees were deported and, in March 2002, three more were deported. Prior to their release, they claimed in a publicly and internationally circulated e-mail letter that the authorities had tortured some of them while in prison.

In 2002 two Filipino Christian residents were arrested and imprisoned in Dammam for conducting a Roman Catholic prayer group in their home. In April 2002, the two Filipinos were sentenced to 150 lashes and deportation following a 30-day jail sentence. They were deported in late May 2002.

In April 2002, police and Mutawwa'in detained a total of 26 Christians in successive raids on two private houses where worship services were being held in a residential area of downtown Riyadh. After two days, 23 of the Christians were released, but one Sudanese and two Sri Lankans were kept in detention and moved to another Riyadh prison. Following these raids, the authorities returned to one of the private houses and confiscated chairs, Bibles, musical instruments, a microphone, and curtains that they ripped from the walls. On September 5, the remaining prisoners were released. The two Sri Lankans were deported and the Sudanese national was resettled in the United States.

There were additional cases of arrests of third country nationals for expressing their religious beliefs. In early 2003, four expatriate Protestants were arrested and three were imprisoned without charge by the Mutawwa'in. Two of those were later released and deported. One was still in prison as of March 12. There was no additional information on the status of these cases as of the end of the year covered by this report.

There have also been reports of surveillance of Christian religious services by security personnel.

In May 2002, police and Mutawwa'in in Jeddah detained 11 Christians, including foreign nationals from both Ethiopia and Eritrea, at the end of the period covered by this report. They allegedly had been engaged in activities that violated restrictions against public worship. All 11 were subsequently deported.

In March 2003, an Eritrean man was arrested in Jeddah and sentenced to deportation for proselytizing Muslims. He was still detained at the end of the period covered by this report. A second, Ethiopian, man was arrested on charges of proselytization, making alcohol, and involvement in prostitution in April and deported in May. The Ethiopian claimed that he was beaten while in custody.

Magic is widely believed in and sometimes practiced; however, under Shari'a, the practice of magic is regarded as the worst form of polytheism, an offense for which no repentance is accepted and which is punishable by death. There are an unknown number of detainees held in prison on the charge of "sorcery," including the practice of "black magic" or "witchcraft." In a few cases in the past, self-proclaimed "miracle workers" have been executed for sorcery involving physical harm or apostasy, but there have been no reports of executions during the period covered by this report. During the period covered by this report, the local press reported several cases of arrests of foreigners and citizens for practicing sorcery.

Mutawwa'in practices and incidents of abuse varied widely in different regions of the country. Reports of incidents were most numerous in the central Nejd region, which includes the capital Riyadh. In certain areas, both the Mutawwa'in and religious vigilantes acting on their own harassed, assaulted, battered, arrested, and detained citizens and foreigners. The Government requires the Mutawwa'in to follow established procedures and to offer instruction in a polite manner; however, Mutawwa'in do not always comply with the requirements. During the period covered by this report, the Government has acknowledged inappropriate conduct by some Mutawwa'in, but has refused to provide information on the number of reported incidents or disciplinary actions. While senior officials have defended the role of the Mutawwa'in, in 2003 the Committee announced plans for a training program for Mutawwa'in in interpersonal skills; however, the extent and effect of the program was not clear as of the end of the period covered by this report. During the period covered by this report, Mutawwa'in excesses have received increasing attention in the English and Arabic press, with editorials, cartoons and letters calling attention to abuses. This trend increased after the May 12 terrorist bombings in Riyadh.

Mutawwa'in enforcement of strict standards of social behavior included closing commercial establishments during five daily prayer observances, insisting upon compliance with strict norms of public dress and dispersing gatherings in public places. Mutawwa'in frequently reproached citizen and foreign women for failure to observe strict dress codes, and detained men and women found together who were not married or closely related.

The Mutawwa'in have the authority to detain persons for no more than 24 hours for violation of strict standards of proper dress and behavior; however, they sometimes exceeded this limit before delivering detainees to the police. Procedures require a police officer to accompany the Mutawwa'in at the time of arrest. Mutawwa'in generally complied with this requirement. According to reports, the Mutawwa'in also are no longer permitted to detain citizens for more than a few hours, may not conduct investigations, and may no longer allow unpaid volunteers to accompany official patrols.

During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of abuse cases involving Hindus. The Government regards members of the large Hindu community as polytheists, and non-Muslim, non-Western religious communities must exercise extreme caution when practicing their religion.

During the period covered by this report, there were frequent instances in which mosque preachers, whose salaries are paid by the Government, used violently anti-Jewish and anti-Christian language in their sermons. Although this language has declined in frequency since the May attacks, there continue to be instances in which Mosque speakers have prayed for the death of Jews and Christians, including from the Grand Mosque in Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina.

Forced Religious Conversion

Under the law, children of male citizens are considered Muslim, regardless of the country or the religious tradition in which they may have been raised. In some cases, children raised in other countries and in other religious traditions who came to the country or who were taken by their citizen fathers to the country reportedly were coerced to conform to Islamic norms and practices, although forcible conversion is prohibited. The Government's application of this law discriminates against non-Muslim, non-Saudi mothers and denies their children the freedom to choose their religion. There were no reports of the forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

As a deeply conservative and devout Muslim society, there is intense pressure to conform to societal norms. During the period covered by this report, there was a report of a Muslim-citizen convert to Christianity who was prosecuted for apostasy. According to his account, members of his family, including his mother and brothers, requested that the Government bring charges and testified against him at his trial. Despite evidence that the individual had renounced his Muslim identity, the court declined to convict him of apostasy and instead convicted him of blasphemy.

The conservative religious leadership also exerts pressure on the state to maintain its strict Islamic practices. During this period, senior leaders made efforts to call for moderation, including the Crown Prince and the Grand Mufti. These efforts intensified after the May terror attacks in Riyadh. To combat religious extremism, in May the Government announced the firing of several hundred prayer leaders and plans to retrain prayer leaders and mosque employees.

In June the Government hosted a “National Intellectual Dialog” that brought together representatives of different Muslim traditions in the country, including Sunni and Shi’ite leaders. Following the meetings, the participants issued a statement acknowledging that theological differences are “natural,” and committing themselves to resolve differences through dialog. Despite some improvement in press freedom—including a limited public discussion of religious issues—there remain severe limitations on criticism of the religious establishment.

There is societal discrimination against members of the Shi’a minority; however, better relations between the country and Iran (a predominately Shi’a nation) improved the climate of Sunni-Shi’a relations in the country. The majority of citizens supports a state based on Islamic law and opposes public non-Muslim worship, although there are differing views as to how this should be realized in practice. The official title of the head of state is “Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques,” and the role of the King and the Government in upholding Islam within the country is regarded as a paramount function throughout the Muslim world.

Many non-Muslims who undertook religious observances privately and discreetly during the period covered by this report were not disturbed; however, problems occurred after some citizens complained to the authorities about services by their neighbors. Some non-Muslims claim that informants paid by the Mutawwa’in infiltrate their private worship groups.

Relations between Muslim-citizens and foreign Muslims are generally good. Each year the country welcomes approximately two million Muslim pilgrims from all over the world and of all branches of Islam, who visit the country during a two-week period to perform the Hajj. Foreign Muslims of all denominations may pray in mosques as long as they follow Sunni prayer practices.

In certain areas, religious vigilantes unaffiliated with the Government and acting on their own harassed, assaulted, battered, arrested, and detained citizens and foreigners.

During the period covered by this report, the local press rarely printed articles or commentaries disparaging other religions.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

U.S. Government policy is to press the Government to consistently honor its public commitment to permit private religious worship by non-Muslims, to eliminate discrimination against minorities, and to promote tolerance toward non-Muslims. The U.S. Ambassador called for increased respect for religious minorities in the country. During the period covered by this report, U.S. Embassy officers met with Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) officials to deliver and discuss the U.S. Government’s 2002 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom. Senior U.S. Embassy officers called on the Government to enforce its public commitment to allow private religious practice, and to respect the rights of Muslims who do not follow the Salafi tradition of Islam. Senior Embassy officials also protested the raids on private homes and detention of Christian worshipers in Riyadh, contributing to the successful release of several Christian prisoners in September 2002. During the period covered by this report, the U.S. Government also facilitated the resettlement of a former Christian prisoner so that he would avoid facing persecution if deported to his country of origin. In addition embassy officers met with MFA officials at various other times during the year on matters pertaining to religious freedom.

SYRIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, it imposes restrictions in some areas.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government monitors the activities of all groups, including religious groups, discourages proselytizing, particularly when it is deemed a threat to the relations among religious groups, and has banned Jehovah’s Witnesses as a “politically motivated Zionist organization.”

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were occasional reports of friction between religious faiths.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 71,498 square miles, and its population is approximately 17 million. Sunni Muslims represent approximately 74 percent of the population (approximately 12.6 million persons). Other Muslim groups, including Druze, Alawi, Ismailis, Shi'a, and Yazidis, constitute an estimated 16 percent of the population (approximately 2.7 million persons). A variety of Christian denominations make up the remaining 10 percent of the population (approximately 1.7 million persons). The great majority of Christians belong to the Eastern groups that have existed in the country since the earliest days of Christianity. The main Eastern groups belong to autonomous Orthodox churches, the Uniate churches, which recognize the Roman Catholic Pope, and the independent Nestorian Church. There also are believed to be approximately 85 Jews. It is difficult to obtain precise population estimates for various religious denominations due to government sensitivity to sectarian demographics.

The largest Christian denomination is the Greek Orthodox Church, known in the country as the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. The Syrian Orthodox Church is notable for its use of a Syriac liturgy. Most Syrians of Armenian origin belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church, which uses an Armenian liturgy. The largest Uniate church in the country is the Greek Catholic Church. Other Uniate denominations include the Maronite Church, the Syrian Catholic Church, and the Chaldean Catholic Church, which derives from the Nestorian Church. The Government also permits the presence, both officially and unofficially, of other Christian denominations, including Baptist, Mennonite, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

Sunni Muslims are present throughout the country. Christians tend to be urbanized and most live in Damascus and Aleppo, although significant numbers live in the Hasaka governorate in the northeast. A majority of the Alawis live in the Latakia governorate. A significant majority of the Druze population resides in the rugged Jabal al-Arab region in the southeast. The few remaining Jews are concentrated in Damascus and Aleppo. Yazidis are found primarily in the northeast.

Foreign missionary groups are present but operate discreetly.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, it discourages public proselytizing and carefully monitors groups it considers to practice militant Islam. There is no official state religion; however, the Constitution requires that the President be a Muslim.

All religions and orders must register with the Government, which monitors fundraising and requires permits for all meetings by religious (and non-religious) groups, except for worship. The registration process can be complicated and lengthy, but the Government usually allows groups to operate informally while awaiting the Government's response.

Recognized religious groups receive free utilities and are exempt from real estate taxes and personal property taxes on official vehicles.

There is a strict *de facto* separation of church and state. Religious groups tend to avoid any involvement in internal political affairs. The Government, in turn, generally refrains from becoming involved in strictly religious issues. Nevertheless, government policies tend to support the study and practice of moderate forms of Islam. For example, the Government selects moderate Muslims for religious leadership positions, is intolerant of and suppresses extremist forms of Islam, and accepted the election in 2003 of a devout, yet moderate Muslim to the Parliament.

The Government generally does not prohibit links by its citizens with coreligionists in other countries or with a supranational hierarchy. In 2001 Pope John Paul II visited the country and conducted a public mass in Damascus, which representatives of all of the country's Orthodox and Uniate Christian denominations attended. The Government also allowed the Pope to tour the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, which was the first time in history that a Pontiff visited a mosque. At a ceremony welcoming the Pope to the country, President Bashar al-Asad gave a speech that was denounced widely as anti-Semitic (see Section IV).

All schools officially are government-run and nonsectarian, although some schools are run in practice by Christian and Jewish minorities. There is mandatory religious instruction in schools, with government-approved teachers and curricula. Religion courses are divided into separate classes for Muslim and Christian students. In the past, Jews had a separate primary school which offered religious instruction on Judaism and other traditional subjects. However, it recently was closed due to

the dwindling size of the Jewish community. Although Arabic is the official language in public schools, the Government permits the teaching of Armenian, Hebrew, Syriac (Aramaic) and Chaldean in some schools on the basis that these are "liturgical languages."

Both Orthodox and Western Easter and three Muslim religious holidays (Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, and the Prophet Mohammed's birthday) are recognized as national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In 1964 the Government banned Jehovah's Witnesses as a "politically motivated Zionist organization." However, members of Jehovah's Witnesses have continued to practice their faith privately despite the official ban.

Although the law does not prohibit proselytizing, in practice the Government discourages such activity, particularly when it is deemed a threat to the relations among religious groups. Foreign missionaries are present, but operate discreetly.

The security services constantly are alert to any possible political threat to the State and all groups, religious and non-religious, are subject to surveillance and monitoring by government security services. The Government considers militant Islam in particular a threat to the regime and follows closely the practice of its adherents. The Government has allowed many mosques to be built; however, it monitors and controls sermons and closes mosques between prayers.

The Government primarily cites tense relations with Israel as the reason for barring Jews from government employment and for exempting them from military service obligations. Jews also are the only religious minority group whose passports and identity cards note their religion.

Government policy officially disavows sectarianism of any kind. However, in the case of President Asad's Alawi Muslim group, religion can be a contributing factor in determining career opportunities. For example, Alawis hold the predominant position in the security services and military, well out of proportion to their percentage of the population.

In keeping with the Government's secular policy, the military does not have a chaplain's corps, members of the military do not have direct access to religious or spiritual support, and soldiers are not expected to express their faith overtly during work hours. For example, Muslims are discouraged from praying while on duty. Religious minorities, with the exception of Jews, are represented among the senior officer corps.

Religious groups are subject to their respective religious laws on marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance.

For Muslims, personal status law on divorce is based on Shari'a (Islamic law) and some of its provisions as interpreted discriminate against women. For example, husbands may claim adultery as grounds for divorce, but wives face more difficulty in presenting the same case. If a woman requests a divorce from her husband, she may not be entitled to child support in some instances. In addition under the law a woman loses the right to custody of her sons when they reach age 9 and her daughters at age 12. Inheritance for Muslims also is based on Shari'a. Accordingly Muslim women usually are granted half of the inheritance share of male heirs. However, Shari'a mandates that male heirs provide financial support to the female relatives who inherit less. For example, a brother who inherits an unmarried sister's share from their parents' estate is obligated to provide for the sister's well-being. If the brother fails to do so, she has the right to sue. Polygyny is legal but is practiced only by a small minority of Muslim men.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Presidential amnesties issued in November 2000 and December 2001 reportedly freed hundreds of oppositionist political prisoners, including many members of the Muslim Brotherhood. The 1999 arrests were motivated primarily by the Government's view of militant Islamists as potential threats to regime stability. There is no current estimate available of the number of Islamists who may remain in custody.

In 2001 there was a credible report that Syrian intelligence officials in Lebanon arrested three Syrian Druze men who had converted to Christianity, possibly on suspicion of being Jehovah's Witnesses. They reportedly were transferred to prison in Syria, held for 2 months, and then released after signing papers stating that they would cease attending their church and cease contact with their pastor.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations among the various religious communities generally are amicable, and there is little evidence of societal discrimination or violence against religious minorities. The press, which the Government tightly controls, generally is careful to avoid making anti-Semitic remarks in their anti-Israeli articles; however, during the period covered by this report, on one occasion the press published a book review of the Arabic translation of David Duke's *Awakening* that could be construed as anti-Semitic. There were occasional reports of friction between religious faiths, which may be related to deteriorating economic conditions and internal political issues. Specifically, there were reports of minor incidents of harassment and property damage against Jews in Damascus. These incidents are believed to be in reaction to Israeli actions against Palestinians.

During hostilities in Iraq, the Grand Mufti criticized U.S. actions and called for Muslims to use all available methods (including martyrdom) to defeat the "invaders." Government officials reportedly did not support his statement and there were no reports that public officials made similar statements.

Although no law prohibits religious denominations from proselytizing, the Government is sensitive to complaints by religious groups of aggressive proselytizing by other groups and has intervened when such activities threatened the relations among religions. Societal conventions make conversions relatively rare, especially in the case of Muslim-to-Christian conversions. In many cases, societal pressure forces those who undertake such conversions to relocate within the country or to leave the country in order to practice their new religion openly.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy officials meet routinely with religious leaders and adherents of almost all denominations at the national, regional, and local levels. In meetings between embassy staff and Government officials, and during high level visits, U.S. employees regularly emphasize the importance of human rights, including freedom of religion. In 2001 the State Department spokesman criticized as unacceptable and regrettable President Asad's speech during the Pope's visit, in which he characterized Jews as the betrayers of Christ and the Prophet Mohammed (see Section II).

Embassy officials remained sensitive to any change in the degree of religious freedom in the country.

TUNISIA

The Constitution provides for the free exercise of religions that do not disturb the public order, and the Government generally respects this right; however, there were some restrictions and abuses. The Constitution declares that Islam is the official state religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government does not permit the establishment of political parties on the basis of religion, prohibits proselytizing, and partially limits the religious freedom of members of the Baha'i Faith.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 63,170 square miles and its population is approximately 10 million. Ninety eight percent of the population is nominally Muslim. There is no reliable data on the number of practicing Muslims. There is a small indigenous Sufi Muslim community; however, there are no statistics regarding its size. Reliable sources report that many Sufis left the country shortly after independence when their religious buildings and land reverted to the Government (as did those of Orthodox Islamic foundations), leaving them no place to worship. Although the Sufi community is small, its tradition of mysticism permeates the practice of Islam throughout the country. During annual Ramadan festivals, Sufis provide public cultural entertainment by performing religious dances. There are also 150 members of the Baha'i Faith.

The nominal Christian community, composed of foreign residents and a small group of native-born citizens of European and/or Arab descent, numbers approximately 20,000 and is dispersed throughout the country. According to church leaders, the practicing Christian population is approximately 1,000 and includes an estimated 200 native-born ethnic Arab citizens who have converted to Christianity. The Catholic Church operates 7 churches, 6 private schools, and 6 cultural centers/libraries throughout the country, as well as 1 hospital in Tunis, the capital. There are approximately 400 practicing Catholics. Most are foreign residents but a small number are native-born citizens of European and/or Arab descent. In addition to holding religious services, the Catholic Church also freely organizes cultural activities and performs charitable work throughout the country. The Russian Orthodox Church has approximately 100 practicing members and operates 1 church in Tunis and another in Bizerte. The French Reform Church operates 1 church in Tunis, with a congregation of 140 primarily foreign members. The Anglican Church has a church in Tunis with approximately 70 foreign members. The 30-member Greek Orthodox Church maintains 3 churches (in Tunis, Sousse, and Jerba). There are also 50 members of Jehovah's Witnesses, of which approximately half are foreign residents and half are native-born citizens.

With 1,800 adherents split nearly equally between the capital and the island of Jerba, the Jewish community is the country's largest indigenous religious minority. The Jewish community on the island of Jerba dates back 2,500 years.

Foreign missionary organizations and groups function; however, they are not permitted to proselytize in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for the free exercise of religions that do not disturb the public order, and the Government generally respects this right; however, it does not permit the establishment of political parties based on religion, forbids proselytizing, and partially limits the religious freedom of Baha'is. The Constitution declares that Islam is the official state religion and stipulates that the President of the Republic must be a Muslim.

The Government recognizes all Christian and Jewish religious organizations that were established before independence in 1956. Although the Government permits Christian churches to operate freely, it has only formally recognized the Catholic Church, via a 1964 concordat with the Holy See. Some observers consider this agreement to be statutory recognition of the Christian religion. In addition to authorizing 14 churches "serving all sects" of the country, the Government recognizes land grants signed by the Bey of Tunis in the 18th and 19th centuries that allow other churches to operate. The Government has not acted on a request for recognition of a Jewish religious organization in Jerba; however, the group is permitted to operate and it performs religious activities and charitable work unhindered.

The Government promotes interfaith understanding by sponsoring regular conferences and seminars on religious tolerance and by facilitating and promoting the annual Jewish pilgrimage to the El-Ghriba Synagogue.

The following religious holidays are considered national holidays: Aid El-Kebir, Ras Al-Am El-Hejri, Moulded, and Aid Essighir.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government controls and subsidizes mosques and pays the salaries of prayer leaders. The President appoints the Grand Mufti of the Republic. The 1988 Law on Mosques provides that only personnel appointed by the Government may lead activities in mosques and stipulates that mosques must remain closed except during prayer times and other authorized religious ceremonies, such as marriages or funerals. New mosques may be built in accordance with national urban planning regulations; however, they then become the property of the State. The Government also partially subsidizes the Jewish community.

The Government does not permit the establishment of political parties on the basis of religion, and uses this prohibition to refuse recognition of the illegal Islamist An-Nahdha Party and to prosecute suspected party members. The Government maintains tight surveillance over Islamists and members of the Islamic fundamentalist community. The Government revoked the identity cards of an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 Islamists and fundamentalists, which prevents them from being employed legally, attending court hearings, or using public telephones or faxes. According to reliable sources, the Government refused to issue passports to Islamists and fundamentalists and has confiscated the passports of a small number of Tunisian converts to Christianity. In at least one case the Government seized the pass-

port of a close relative of an Islamic activist, allegedly for the sole reason that they were related. The Government maintained that only the courts possess the power to revoke passports under public laws; however, reports indicate that the Government rarely observed this separation of powers in politically sensitive religious cases.

The Government forbids the wearing of hijab (headscarves traditionally worn by Islamist and Islamic fundamentalist women) in government offices; however, a few female government employees were seen wearing the hijab in their offices. The Government characterizes the hijab as a "garment of foreign origin having a partisan connotation" and prohibits its use in public institutions in order to "observe impartiality required of officials in their professional relations with others." There were some reports of police requiring women to remove their hijabs in offices, on the street, and at certain public gatherings.

The Government allows the Jewish community freedom of worship and pays the salary of the Grand Rabbi. It also partially subsidizes restoration and maintenance costs for some synagogues. In 1999, the provisional Jewish community elected a new board of directors, its first since independence in 1956; however, the board has not met while it awaits approval from the governor of Tunisia. Once the governor approves the election, which originally was expected to be only a formality, the board (now referred to as the Jewish Committee of Tunisia) is expected to receive permanent status. The governor had not granted approval by the end of the period covered by this report, although approval remains expected. The Government permits the Jewish community to operate private religious schools and allows Jewish children on the island of Jerba to split their academic day between secular public schools and private religious schools. The Government also encourages Jewish émigrés to return for the annual Jewish pilgrimage to the historic El-Ghriba Synagogue on the island of Jerba. However, during the period covered by this report, the Government continued to refuse recognition to a Jewish religious organization in Jerba, although the group has been permitted to operate and perform religious activities and charity work unhindered.

Baha'is regard their faith as a religion distinct from Islam. However, the Government regards the Baha'i Faith as a heretical sect of Islam and only permits its adherents to practice their faith in private. The Government permits Baha'is to hold meetings of their National Council in private homes but prohibits them from organizing local councils. The Government reportedly pressures Baha'is to eschew organized religious activities. There are credible reports that police periodically call in prominent Baha'is for questioning; however, the number of such incidents decreased during the period covered by this report. The Government also unofficially denied the Baha'i request for permission to elect local assemblies during the period covered by this report. The Government also does not permit Baha'is to accept a declaration of faith from persons who wish to convert.

In general the Government does not permit Christian groups to establish new churches, and proselytizing is viewed as an act against public order. Foreign missionary organizations and groups are active; however, they are not permitted to proselytize. Authorities deport foreigners suspected of proselytizing and do not permit them to return. There were no reported cases of official action against persons suspected of proselytizing during the period covered by this report; however, in 2001, there were reports that materials distributed by Christian missionaries in Sfax were confiscated from local secondary students.

During the period covered by this report, there were reports of cases in which the Government punished individuals who converted to another faith from Islam by denying them the ability to obtain a passport. In previous years the Government denied converts the right to vote and serve in the military, among other rights.

Islamic religious education is mandatory in public schools, but the religious curriculum for secondary school students also includes the history of Judaism and Christianity. The Zeitouna Koranic School is part of the Government's national university system.

Both religious and secular nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are governed by the same legal and administrative regulations that impose some restrictions on freedom of assembly. For example, all NGOs are required to notify the Government of meetings to be held in public spaces at least 3 days in advance and to submit lists of all meeting participants to the Ministry of Interior. One group, composed of foreign Christians mostly from Sweden and the United Kingdom, is active in providing medical and social services in the city of Kasserine in the west. Despite its ambiguous legal status, this group (with 15 to 20 members) reports that it is free to pursue its social and medical work without interference and states that it does not believe that it is subject to religious discrimination.

Religious groups are subjected to the same restrictions on freedom of speech and the press as secular groups. Primary among these restrictions is “depot legal,” which requires that printers and publishers provide copies of all publications to Ministry of Interior censors prior to publication. For publications printed abroad, distributors must deposit copies with the Chief Prosecutor and other ministries prior to their public release. In 2001 the Chamber of Deputies approved several changes to the Press Code, including the designation of the Ministry of Human Rights, Communications, and Relations with the Chamber of Deputies as the sole central censorship office.

Although Christian groups reported that they were able to distribute previously approved religious publications in European languages without difficulty, they said the Government generally did not grant permission to publish and distribute Arabic-language Christian texts. Moreover, the Government only allowed sanctioned religious communities to distribute religious publications. It considered other groups’ distribution of religious documents to be an illegal “threat to public order.”

Muslim women are not permitted to marry outside their religion. Marriages of Muslim women to non-Muslim men abroad are considered common law, which are prohibited and thus void when the couple returns to the country. Muslim men and non-Muslim women who are married may not inherit from each other, and children from those marriages (all of whom the Government considered to be Muslim) cannot inherit from their mothers. Civil law is codified; however, judges are known to override codified law if their interpretation of Shari’a (Islamic law) contradicts it. For example, codified laws provide women with the legal right to have custody over their minor children; however, judges have refused to grant women permission to leave the country with them, holding that Shari’a appoints the father as the head of the family and that he must grant permission for the children to travel.

Generally, Shari’a based interpretation of civil law is applied only in some family cases. Some families avoid the effects of Shari’a on inheritance by executing sales contracts between parents and children to ensure that sons and daughters receive equal shares of property.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, credible sources estimate that approximately 500 persons were serving prison sentences because of their membership in the illegal Islamist group An-Nahdha or for their alleged Islamist sympathies. Other sources claim that the number of those prisoners is as low as 100 or as high as 1,000; however, there were no reports of cases in which it was clear that persons were arrested or detained based solely on their religious beliefs. The Government claims An-Nahdha is a terrorist organization and has accused it of plotting the overthrow of the Government in the early 1990s. A credible source reported that high-ranking An-Nahdha leaders have been held in solitary confinement since 1991.

The Government maintained that “the rights of prisoners are carefully protected in the country and the law provides both disciplinary measures and judicial sanctions for government officials who, in the exercise of their duties, violate the physical integrity of individuals”; however, independent reports indicated the contrary and suggest that Ministry of Interior officials routinely torture politically sensitive prisoners. Presiding judges in trials of Islamists routinely refuse to investigate claims by defendants that their confessions were extracted under torture.

The Government also continued to place Islamists under administrative control. For example, Hedi Bejaoui has been under administrative control since 1990. Bejaoui was arrested and released in 1990 for membership in An-Nahdha. In May 2001 he began a hunger strike that lasted 6 weeks to protest his administrative control and the seizure of his passport. Bejaoui attempted to travel abroad for medical treatment after the authorities took his medical insurance card. On March 23, Abdelouahab Boussaa, sentenced in 1991 to 16 years imprisonment for membership to An-Nahdha, died in detention following a 4-month hunger strike protesting his conditions in detention. Two weeks later Lakhdar Essdiri died, possibly from medical neglect, while serving a 28-year sentence for An-Nahdha activities.

Sources also report that police awaken suspected Islamists in the night and bring them to police headquarters for interrogation. Human rights activists allege that the Government subjected the family members of Islamist activists to arbitrary arrest and other restrictions, reportedly utilizing charges of “association with criminal elements” to punish family members. For example, one female medical doctor claims that she has been unemployed since 1997 because police have pressured hospitals not to hire her because her husband was convicted of membership in An-Nahdha. One man claimed that for 8 years, the Government refused to issue him a passport because his brother was prosecuted for membership in An-Nahdha.

According to human rights lawyers, the Government regularly questioned Muslims who were observed praying frequently in mosques. Reliable sources report that the authorities instruct imams to espouse government social and economic programs during prayer times in mosques. Sources indicated that an imam in the city of Kairouan issued a fatwa against former Education Minister and human rights activist Mohamed Charfi in June 2002. The reasons for such an edict are unclear but Charfi is a prominent activist and potential government opponent and many in civil society circles believe the edict was aimed at intimidating him.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who have been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship between religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were incidents of religiously motivated violence. In March 2002, a synagogue in the Tunis suburb of La Marsa was broken into and vandalized. In April 2002, a synagogue in Sfax, a southern commercial city also was vandalized. No injuries were reported and damage at each of the synagogues was minor. The Government responded by increasing security at both sites.

In April 2002, a terrorist attack outside the historic El-Ghriba synagogue on the island of Jerba killed 21 persons and damaged the interior of the synagogue. Two weeks before the annual El-Ghriba pilgrimage (See Section I), the driver of a truck transporting liquid gas detonated an explosive device while the truck stood at the Synagogue's compound wall. The explosion killed 17 tourists and 4 Tunisians, including the driver. The Government initially claimed that the explosion was an accident; however, on April 22, after German authorities became involved in the investigation, it admitted that the incident was an attack. The Government provided increased security for the synagogue and encouraged pilgrims and tourists to visit El-Ghriba despite the attack.

There is great societal pressure against Muslim conversion to other religions, and conversion from Islam is relatively rare. Muslims who do convert may face social ostracism for converting. There is some conversion among individuals in the Christian and Jewish communities.

Despite a history of social pressure by middle and upper class secularists to discourage women from wearing the hijab, anecdotal suggests that the number of young middle class urban Tunisian women choosing to wear the hijab rose during the period covered by this report. Notably, many observers consider this trend to be less a sign of increasing religiosity among young citizens than a reaction to perceived increasing pressure from modernity on traditional Arab/Muslim culture.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

The U.S. Embassy maintains good relations with leaders of majority and minority religious groups throughout the country, and the Ambassador and other embassy officials met regularly with Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Baha'i religious leaders throughout the period covered by this report. Embassy officials discussed religious freedom issues with government officials on various occasions during the year.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion in accordance with established customs, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however there were some restrictions. The Government controls virtually all Sunni mosques, prohibits proselytizing, and restricts the freedom of assembly and association, thereby limiting the ability of religious groups without dedicated religious buildings to worship and conduct business. The Federal Constitution declares that Islam is the official religion of all seven of the constituent emirates of the federal union. The Government permits de facto recognition of a small number of Christian denominations through the issuance of land use permits for the construction and operation of churches.

The status of respect for religious freedom improved somewhat during the period covered by this report. Two new churches opened with a capacity of at least 1,000

people. The fifth Indian Orthodox Church in the country also opened, and permission was granted to build another Coptic Orthodox Church.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country's total land area is 32,300 square miles, and its population is approximately 3.8 million. More than 80 percent of the population are noncitizens. Virtually all of the country's citizens are Muslims; approximately 85 percent are Sunni and the remaining 15 percent are Shi'a. Foreigners are predominantly from South and Southeast Asia, although there are a substantial number from the Middle East, Europe, and North America. Although no official figures are available, local observers estimate that approximately 55 percent of the foreign population is Muslim, 25 percent is Hindu, 10 percent is Christian, 5 percent is Buddhist, and 5 percent (most of whom reside in Dubai and Abu Dhabi) belongs to other religions, including Parsi, Baha'i, and Sikh. There are foreign missionaries operating in the country. The Government does not permit foreign missionaries to proselytize Muslims; however, they have performed humanitarian missionary work since before the country's independence in 1971. In 1960 Christian missionaries opened a maternity hospital in Abu Dhabi Emirate; the hospital continued to operate at the end of the period covered by this report. Missionaries also operate a maternity hospital in Fujairah Emirate. An International Bible Society representative in Al-Ain distributes Bibles and other religious material to Christian religious groups.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion in accordance with established customs, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there were some restrictions. The Government controls virtually all Sunni mosques, prohibits proselytizing, and restricts the freedom of assembly and association, thereby greatly limiting the ability of religious groups without dedicated religious buildings to worship and conduct business. The Constitution declares that Islam is the official religion of all seven of the constituent emirates of the federal union. The Government permits de facto recognition of a small number of Christian denominations through the issuance of land use permits for the construction and operation of churches. Religious groups without dedicated buildings of worship often use the facilities of other religious groups or worship in private homes, generally without government interference.

The Government funds or subsidizes virtually all Sunni mosques and employs all Sunni imams; approximately 5 percent of Sunni mosques are entirely private, and several large mosques have large private endowments. The Government distributes guidance on religious sermons to mosques and imams, whether Sunni or Shi'a, and monitors all sermons for political content.

The Shi'a minority, which is concentrated in the northern emirates, is free to worship and maintain its own mosques. All Shi'a mosques are considered private and receive no funds from the Government. Shi'a imams are government-appointed only in Dubai Emirate. Shi'a Muslims in Dubai may pursue Shi'a family law cases through a special Shi'a council rather than the Shari'a courts.

The Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Awqaf operates as the central federal regulatory authority for Muslim imams and mosques. There is no such authority for the recognition and regulation of non-Muslim religions, and no licensing or registration requirements. The Government permits de facto the practices of officially unrecognized religious groups through the issuance of land use permits to build and operate religious buildings.

Non-Muslim groups can own their own houses of worship—wherein they can practice their religion freely by requesting a land grant and permission to build a compound from the local ruler (the title for the land remains with the ruler). Groups that do not have their own buildings must use the facilities of other religious organizations or worship in private homes. The police or other security forces do not interfere with gatherings held in private homes.

There are approximately 23 Christian churches in the country built on land donated by the ruling families of the Emirates in which they are located. There are also two Sikh temples and one Hindu temple in the country. Three emirates are home to parochial primary and secondary schools. Abu Dhabi and Dubai Emirates

have donated land for Christian cemeteries, and Abu Dhabi has donated land for a Baha'i cemetery. There are two operating cremation facilities and associated cemeteries for the Hindu community, one in Dubai and one in Sharjah.

Non-Muslim religious groups do not receive funds from the Government; however, those with land grants are not charged rental payments and some of the religious buildings constructed on land grants were donated by the local ruling families. In addition, Sharjah Emirate waives payment of utilities for religious buildings. Non-Muslim groups raise money from among their congregants and receive financial support from abroad. Religious groups also advertise certain religious functions in the press, such as memorial services, choral concerts, and fundraising events.

The Government supports in practice a moderate interpretation of Islam.

There is no formalized method for granting religious groups official status. Rather, the ruling families may grant access to land to religious groups with permission to build religious buildings. Since not all religious groups have land-use grants with religious buildings built thereon, several unrelated religious groups are required to share common facilities. Even so, because the official interpretation of Islam considers Christianity to be one of the three monotheistic religions, facilities for Christian congregations are far greater in number and size than those for other non-Muslim communities, despite the fact that Christians represent less than a quarter of non-Muslim foreigners.

As the state religion, Islam is favored over other religions and conversion to Islam is viewed favorably. A list of Muslim converts is published annually. Prisoners who convert to Islam often receive a reduction in their sentences. Anecdotal evidence suggests that private sources often provide converts to Islam with monetary payments and job offers.

The Government follows a policy of tolerance toward non-Muslim religions and, in practice, interferes very little in their religious activities. Differences in the treatment of Muslim and non-Muslim groups are due primarily to differences in citizenship status.

During the period covered by this report, the rulers of the various emirates pardoned prisoners on religious and national holidays without regard to the prisoners' religious affiliations. Those pardoned generally are serving sentences from 3 to 5 years for financial crimes, immigration violations, and other minor offenses; pardons reportedly were not extended to prisoners convicted of murder, rape, and kidnapping.

The principal religious advisor to Abu Dhabi Emirate's ruler regularly represents the country at ecumenical conferences and events in other countries.

The following religious holidays are considered national holidays: Waqfa, Eid Al-Adha, the Islamic New Year, the Prophet's Birthday, Ascension Day, and Eid Al-Fitr. There are no reports that these holidays negatively impact other religious groups because of their religious affiliation; however, all residents and visitors are required by law during Ramadan to respect and abide by some of the behavior restrictions imposed on Muslims, and are forbidden to eat, drink, or smoke publicly during fasting hours.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Federal Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Awqaf distributes weekly guidance to both Sunni imams and Shi'a sheikhs regarding religious sermons and ensures that clergy not deviate frequently or significantly from approved topics in their sermons. All Sunni imams are employees of the Federal Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Awqaf or of individual emirate departments. Except in Dubai, where the Department of Islamic Affairs and Endowments controls the appointment of preachers and the conduct of their work in all mosques, the Government does not appoint sheikhs for Shi'a mosques.

In 1999 land was designated in Ras Al-Khaimah Emirate for the construction of a new Catholic church, but the church has not yet received permission to open, even though construction was completed in 2000.

There are no Buddhist temples; however, Buddhists, along with Hindus and Sikhs in cities without temples, conduct religious ceremonies in private homes without interference. There are two Sikh temples and one Hindu temple in the country. There are only two operating cremation facilities and associated cemeteries for the large Hindu community, one in Dubai and one in Sharjah. Official permission must be obtained for their use in every instance, posing a hardship for the large Hindu community.

The Government prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing or distributing religious literature under penalty of criminal prosecution and imprisonment for engaging in behavior offensive to Islam. While there is no law against missionary activi-

ties, the Government reportedly has threatened to revoke the residence permits of persons suspected of missionary activities.

In 2002, Dubai Police Criminal Investigation Department (CID) arrested a Filipino evangelical Christian pastor, Fernando Alconga, for distributing Christian/Biblical literature to an Egyptian Muslim in a parking lot. Alconga was detained for 36 days for “preaching other than the Islamic religion” and then released on bail. His movements in the country were not restricted, and he reportedly continued to preach to church congregations throughout the country after his release. A panel of Islamic scholars found Alconga’s materials to be “acceptable for private use, but not for distributing to non-Christians and a court convicted him of “abusing Islam.” Alconga was given a suspended 1-year sentence and deported to the Philippines in July.

Immigration authorities routinely ask foreigners applying for residence permits to declare their religious affiliation; however, the Government reportedly does not collect or analyze this information, and religious affiliation is not a factor in the issuance or renewal of visas or residence permits. In late 2001, Abu Dhabi inquired about religious affiliation in its first municipality-wide census. The federal Ministry of Planning does not publish this data.

During the period covered by this report, customs authorities questioned the entry of large quantities of religious materials (such as Bibles and hymnals) that they deemed in excess of the normal requirements of existing congregations, although in most instances the items were permitted entry. Customs authorities reportedly are less likely to question the importation of Christian religious items than that of non-Muslim, non-Christian religious items, although in virtually all instances importation of the material in question eventually has been permitted.

There is a dual system of Shari’a (Islamic) courts for criminal and family law matters and secular courts for civil law matters. Non-Muslims are tried for criminal offenses in Shari’a courts. Not all crimes are punishable by Shari’a penalties. In cases punishable by Shari’a penalty, non-Muslims may receive civil penalties at the discretion of the judge, which generally occurs. Shari’a penalties imposed on non-Muslims also may be overturned or modified by a higher court.

Family law for Muslims is governed by Shari’a and the local Shari’a courts. Dubai has a special Shi’a council to act on matters pertaining to Shi’a family law. Muslim men may marry non-Muslim women “of the book,” that is, Christian or Jewish women; however, Muslim women are not permitted to marry non-Muslim men unless the men convert to Islam. Because Islam does not consider the marriage between a non-Muslim man and a Muslim woman valid, both are subject to arrest, trial, and imprisonment on grounds of fornication. Shari’a, according to the Maliki school of jurisprudence, also is applied in cases of divorce. Women are granted custody of female children until they reach the age of maturity and are granted temporary custody of male children until they reach the age of 12. If the mother is deemed unfit, custody reverts to the next able female relative on the mother’s side. Shari’a permits polygyny.

Islamic studies are mandatory in public schools (schools supported by the Federal Government for primarily citizen children) and in private schools for Muslim children. Religious instruction in non-Muslim religions is not permitted in public schools; however, religious groups may conduct religious instruction for their members on their religious compounds, and there are parochial schools operating in the country. According to Article 84 of the Executive System of Private Education, private schools found teaching subjects that contravene Islam, defame any religion, or contravene the nation’s ethics and beliefs, may face penalties, including closure.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In June, the Government initiated a public religious education campaign to promote a better understanding of Islam, including a 1-year training course for 166 imams.

During the period covered by this report, the Coptic Orthodox Church received permission to build a church in Abu Dhabi. Two new churches also opened—a 1,000-plus capacity Coptic Orthodox church and service facility in Dubai, and a 1,000-plus capacity Catholic Church and hall in Fujeirah emirate. In 2002, the Al-Ain municipal government authorized a land grant to the Anglican Church. The Fujeirah government authorized land grants for the construction of an Indian Orthodox church

and a Catholic Church. In May, the Indian Orthodox church opened in a public ceremony. In 2001, ground was broken in Jebel Ali for the construction of several churches on a parcel of land donated by the Government to four Protestant and one Catholic congregation. In 2001, Dubai Emirate's second Catholic church opened in Jebel Ali. In 2001, the Crown Prince of Dubai authorized the construction of a Syrian Orthodox church on donated land and in 2001, the Patriarch consecrated the church.

The UAE Red Crescent transferred funds from President Zayed to the Palestinian Authority Minister of Public Works for the repair of the Church of the Nativity and the Omar Mosque, both of which were damaged during the 3-week standoff between Israelis and Palestinians in April.

Also in 2002, the Council of Evangelical Churches hosted a 3-day public conference in Abu Dhabi, which featured an internationally renowned Christian speaker, seminars, and workshops, with events for adults and children. The Catholic Bishop to the Arabian Peninsula delivered a speech on religious tolerance to Zayed Center for Coordination and Follow-up and paid an official visit to Supreme Council member and Ruler of Ajman Emirate Shaykh Humaid bin Rashid Al-Nuaimi. The Coptic Archbishop of Jerusalem and the Near East also delivered a lecture on religious tolerance at the Zayed Center.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

While citizens regard the country as a Muslim nation that should respect Muslim religious sensibilities on matters such as public consumption of alcohol, proper dress, and proper public comportment, society also emphasizes respect for privacy and Islamic traditions of tolerance, particularly with respect to forms of Christianity. Modest casual attire for men and women generally is permitted in most emirates and facilities frequented by foreigners. Many hotels, stores, and other businesses patronized by both citizens and foreigners are permitted to sell alcohol and pork to non-Muslims, and to acknowledge non-Muslim holidays such as Christmas, Easter, and Diwali (although such displays generally are not permitted during the month of Ramadan). Citizens occasionally express concern regarding the influence on society of the cultures of the country's foreign majority. However, in general, citizens are familiar with foreign societies and believe that the best way to balance foreign influence is by supporting and strengthening indigenous cultural traditions.

There were no anti-Semitic or religiously intolerant articles or statements in the English- and Arabic-language electronic and print media. On a daily basis, all media did carry articles or statements criticizing the policies and actions of the Israeli Government.

The Zayed Center for Coordination and Follow-up sponsored a conference on "semitism" in the summer of 2002 during which remarks attributed to Center employees and speakers denied the Holocaust. The Center has allowed anti-Semitic language on its Web site and published books such as "The Zionist Movement and its Animosity to Jews" and "Al Buraq Wall, Not Wailing Wall."

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

Embassy officials in Abu Dhabi and Consulate General officials in Dubai have discussed religious tolerance and freedom with government officials on a number of occasions, and have encouraged the Government to increase religious freedom by permitting the opening or expansion of religious facilities for the large expatriate population. Embassy officials have expressed concern to the Government about statements and publications expressing religious intolerance on the web site of Zayed Center for Coordination and Follow-up. Embassy and consulate officials also help to protect religious freedom by monitoring its status through informal inquiries and meetings with Government officials and representatives of Muslim, Christian, and other faiths. For example, during the period covered by this report, U.S. Embassy and Consulate officials closely monitored the criminal proceedings in the case of the evangelical Christian pastor arrested for proselytizing. The Consul General urged Government officials to dispose of the case in a manner acceptable to all parties involved.

WESTERN SAHARA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; due to continuing Moroccan administrative control of the territory of the Western Sahara, the laws and restrictions regarding religious organizations and religious freedom are similar to those found in the Kingdom of Morocco.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The territory has a total area of approximately 102,706 square miles, and its population is approximately 245,000. The overwhelming majority of the population is Sunni Muslim.

There is a tiny foreign community working for the United Nations Interposition Force in the territory (known by its French acronym, MINURSO).

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; due to continuing Moroccan administrative control of the territory of the Western Sahara, laws and restrictions regarding religious organizations and religious freedom are similar to those found in the kingdom of Morocco.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Restrictions on religious freedom in the Western Sahara are similar to those found in Morocco.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government, through the U.S. Embassy in Morocco, discusses religious freedom issues in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

YEMEN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there were some restrictions. The Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a is the source of all legislation.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Followers of religions other than Islam are free to worship according to their beliefs; however, the Government forbids conversions to other religions from Islam and prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 203,850 square miles, and its population is approximately 19 million. Virtually all citizens are Muslims, either of the Zaydi order of Shi'a Islam or the Shafa'i order of Sunni Islam, approximately 30 percent and 70 percent of the total population, respectively. There also are a few thousand Ismaili Muslims, mostly in the north.

Except for a few families living in Aden who trace their origins to India, almost all Christians are temporary foreign residents. There are a few Hindus in Aden who also trace their origins to India. There are several churches and Hindu places of worship in Aden, but no non-Muslim public places of worship exist in the former North Yemen, largely because northern Yemen does not have the same history of a large, resident foreign community as in the south.

Christian missionaries operate in the country. Most are dedicated to the provision of medical services; others are employed in teaching and social services. Invited by the Government, the Sisters of Charity run homes for the poor and persons with disabilities in Sana'a, Taiz, Hodeida, and Aden. The Government has requested that the Vatican open additional Sisters of Charity facilities. The Government issues residence visas to priests so that they may provide for their community's religious needs. There is also a German Christian charitable mission in Hodeida and a Dutch Christian medical mission in Saada. After more than 30 years of running a hospital in Jibla, an American Baptist congregation completed a long-planned turnover of the facility to local management but remains involved in the day-to-day operations. The Anglican Church runs a charitable clinic in Aden. An American nongovernmental organization (NGO), run by the Seventh-day Adventists, operates in four governorates.

Nearly all of the country's once sizable Jewish population has emigrated since 1948. Approximately 500 Jews are scattered in a handful of villages between Sana'a and Saada in the northern part of the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there were some restrictions. The Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a is the source of all legislation. Followers of other religions are free to worship according to their beliefs and to wear religiously distinctive ornaments or dress; however, the Government forbids conversions from Islam, requires permission for the construction of new places of worship, and prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing Muslims and holding elected office.

The following religious holidays are considered national holidays: Islamic New Year, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing Muslims. Under Islam as practiced in the country, the conversion of a Muslim to another religion is considered apostasy, a crime punishable by death. There were no reports of cases in which the crime was charged or prosecuted by government authorities.

The Government does not allow the building of new non-Muslim public places of worship without permission; however, in 1998 the country established diplomatic relations with the Vatican and agreed to the construction and operation of a "Christian center" in Sana'a. Catholic, Protestant, and Ethiopian Christians hold weekly services in various locations in Sana'a without government interference. Christian church services are held regularly in other cities in private homes or facilities such as schools without harassment, and such facilities appear adequate to accommodate the small numbers involved.

In May 2002, the Papal Nuncio, resident in Kuwait, presented his credentials to the Government and was accredited as a nonresident ambassador. In 2000 President Ali Abdullah Saleh paid an official visit to the Vatican at the time of his state visit to Italy. In 1999 the country's ambassador to Italy was accredited to the Vatican.

Public schools provide instruction in Islam but not in other religions. However, almost all foreigners who are not Muslims attend private schools.

There are no legal restrictions on the approximately 500 Jews who remain in the country, although there are traditional restrictions on places of residence and choice of employment (see Section III). In mid-2000, the Government suspended its policy of allowing Israeli passport holders of Yemeni origin to travel to the country on *lais-*

sez-passer documents; however, Yemeni, Israeli, and other Jews may travel freely to and within the country on non-Israeli passports.

In an attempt to curb extremism, the Government has attempted to prevent the politicization of mosques, including by monitoring mosques for sermons that incite violence or other political statements that it considers harmful to public security. Private Islamic organizations may maintain ties to pan-Islamic organizations and, in the past, have operated private schools; however, the Government monitors their activities. In 2001, the Government mandated the implementation of a 1992 law to unify educational curriculums and administration of all publicly funded schools; the process of absorbing publicly funded Islamic schools into the national system was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

Non-Muslims may vote; however, they may not hold elected office.

Following unification of the North and South in 1990, owners of property previously expropriated by the Communist government of the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, including religious organizations, were invited to seek restitution of their property; however, implementation of the process, including for religious institutions, has been extremely limited, and very few properties have been returned to previous owners.

Shari'a-based law and social custom discriminate against women. Men are permitted to take as many as four wives, although very few do so. By law the minimum age of marriage is 15. However, the law largely is not enforced, and some girls marry as early as age 12. In 2001, the Women's National Committee proposed an amendment to increase the minimum age for marriage to 18. The Cabinet approved the proposal and the measure was still pending in the Parliament at the end of the period covered by this report. The law stipulates that the wife's "consent" to the marriage is required; "consent" is defined as "silence" for previously unwed women and "pronouncement of consent" for divorced women. The husband and the wife's "guardian" (usually her father) sign the marriage contract; in Aden and some outlying governorates, the wife also signs. The practice of bride-price payments is widespread, despite efforts to limit the size of such payments. During the period covered by this report, the Cabinet issued the "House of Obedience" law, which contained provisions that would have forced women who have left their husbands to return to them. Parliament passed the law; however NGOs, lawyers, journalists, and the Women's National Committee conducted a grassroots effort to lobby against the provisions. Subsequently, the Government removed the provisions.

The law provides that the wife must obey the husband. She must live with him at the place stipulated in the contract, consummate the marriage, and not leave the home without his consent. Husbands may divorce wives without justifying their action in court; however, courts routinely mandate lengthy reconciliation periods prior to granting the husband's petition for divorce. A woman has the legal right to divorce; however, she must provide a justification, such as her husband's nonsupport, impotence, abrogation of the marriage contract (for example; of guarantees regarding her education or employment options), or taking of a second wife without her consent. A woman seeking a divorce also must repay the mahr (a portion of her bride price), which creates an additional hardship.

Women who seek to travel abroad must obtain permission from their husbands, fathers, or male relatives to receive a passport and to travel. They also are expected to be accompanied by male relatives. However, enforcement of this requirement is irregular. Shari'a-based law permits a Muslim man to marry a Christian or Jewish woman, but no Muslim woman may marry outside of Islam. Women do not have the right to confer citizenship on their foreign-born spouses; however, they may confer citizenship on children born in the country of foreign-born fathers.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Official government policy does not prohibit or punish the possession of non-Islamic religious literature; however, on occasion, there were unconfirmed reports that police harassed foreigners for possessing such literature. In addition, some members of the security forces occasionally censor the mail of Christian clergy who minister to the foreign community, ostensibly to prevent proselytizing.

There were also unconfirmed reports that on occasion some police, without the authorization or knowledge of their superiors, harassed and detained persons suspected of apostasy in order to compel them to renounce their conversions.

There were no reports of persons detained or imprisoned based solely on their religious beliefs. Police and security forces detained suspected members of radical Islamist groups with clear links to terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report. Since 2001, several hundred "Afghan Arabs" (Islamists who had returned after spending time in Afghanistan) have been detained for questioning.

Many such persons were released within days; however, some reportedly continue to be detained beyond the maximum detention period.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The country is predominantly Muslim and relations among religious groups generally are amicable. There were no reported incidents of violence or discrimination between the adherents of the two main orders of Islam, Zaydi and Shafa'i. Except for a small politically motivated clerical minority, religiously motivated violence is neither incited nor tolerated by the Islamic clergy.

There are very small numbers of religious minorities and they generally live in harmony with their Muslim neighbors. Apart from a small but undetermined number of Christians and Hindus of South Asian origin in Aden, Jews are the only indigenous religious minority. Their numbers have diminished significantly—from several tens of thousands to approximately 500—due to voluntary emigration over the last 50 years. Although the law makes no distinction, Jews traditionally are restricted to living in one section of a city or village and often are confined to a limited choice of employment, usually farming or handicrafts (primarily silver working). They are respected for their craftsmanship and their silver work is highly prized. Jews may, and do, own land. They may vote; however, as non-Muslims, they may not hold elected office (see Section II). Traditionally the tribal leaders of the regions in which the Jews have resided are responsible for protecting the Jews in their areas. A failure to provide this protection is considered a serious personal dishonor.

Christian clergy who minister to the foreign community are employed in teaching, social services, and health care.

In December 2002, extremists carried out two apparently religiously motivated attacks. On December 28, Ali al-Jarallah killed Yemeni Socialist Party leader Jarallah Omar at a political party conference, and on December 30, 2002, Abed Abdul Razak Kamel killed three hospital workers and injured one at an American Baptist-run hospital in Jibla. Kamel later said the two attacks were coordinated, and that they were targeting "seculars," Christians who proselytized and members of a sect of Islam called the al-Buhrah. Trials for both were ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

The media in general, including government-owned press, refer to the Israeli government and its leader as "Zionists." Developments taking place in the Middle East appear to have led to an intensification of anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic attacks in the mass media on an almost daily basis.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy maintains an active dialog on human rights issues with the Government, NGOs, and others, and discusses religious freedom issues in the overall context of the promotion of human rights. Embassy officers, including the Ambassador, meet periodically with representatives of the Jewish and Christian communities.